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Kumo Desu ga, Nani ka?

– I'm A Spider, So What? –

– Part 1 –

Chapter 1-100

(Chapter 1 – Side Story 15)

Author:

Baba Okina

Artist:

Tsukasa Kiryu

Translated by:

[blastron]

Synopsis.

The world where the Hero and the Demon King continue to oppose each other. The grand magic from the Hero and the Demon King cross over worlds and exploded in the classroom of a certain high school.

The students who died in the explosion will be reincarnated in a different world. The protagonist, who has the lowest reputation in the class, was reincarnated into a spider. Nevertheless, she adapted quickly to the present condition with strong willpower.

This is a story of she who has become a spider trying whatever she can to live.

Chapter 1: Prologue

This is a world where the Hero and the Demon Lord have fought countless battles since time immemorial.

There has always been, and shall always be, a Demon Lord, a being of such power that its foul reign is used to mark an age. Even if one is struck down, another powerful demon will invariably rise to take its place, the demonic ruler of a new era. This is the immutable rule of this world: although the demons' onslaught can be stopped temporarily, they can never be truly defeated.

There have been many such Demon Lords, and each has been different from the last. One had such strength that it could split the earth with its mighty fists, leaving new valleys in its wake. Another had complete mastery over the darkest of magics, capable weaving over a thousand spells in concert. What does not differ between Demon Lords, however, is their insurmountable strength and their unrelenting aggression towards the tribes of man.

The Hero is mankind's only hope in the fight against the demons. So as there is always another Demon Lord, a new Hero is anointed as well when the previous one is slain. As such, the battle between humanity and the demons shifts back and forth, unceasing, even to this day. Such is the fate of this world.

An especially powerful Hero and Demon Lord fought each other, once, and were so evenly matched that they were forced to bring their full abilities to bear. They were both masters of the rare and powerful Dimensional Magic, which could warp space and time with godly power. Their great spells crashed against each other, causing the world to scream under the stress, until it erupted in a blast that obliterated both the Hero and the Demon Lord.

The aftershock tore its way through space and time until it reached another dimension. In this dimension, on a planet called Earth, in a nation named Japan, it wreaked havoc on a particular high school classroom. All twenty-six students and their teacher were killed instantly by the violent detonation. The media called it the "mystery explosion", and it was investigated thoroughly, but none of the dead would ever find out what happened.

Even after they had been reborn into their next life, they wouldn't ever find out what happened.

After all, their spirits had been torn from their own world by the dimensional riptide and drawn back into the world where the Hero and Demon King had fought. They were scattered across the land, and reborn into this new world.

This is the story of one of those souls.

Aaargh!

I try to let out a scream, but nothing comes out. What's wrong with my voice? Did I get hurt so badly that I can't even scream?!

...Okay, okay, calm down, get a grip, think. What happened? I remember that I was in the middle of Japanese Lit, then suddenly everything went white with agony. Sure, I felt like I was going to die back then, but strangely enough I'm not hurting at all right now. All I can see is pitch blackness though, so I have no idea where I am.

...Come to think of it, I can't really feel anything either. It's almost like my body is wrapped in something that's making it impossible for me to move.

Is... is this what it's like to be in a coma? Oh my god. I don't want to believe it, but it seems very, very much like this is the case. I don't really know what happened, but now I'm in a coma.

No waaay. I can think, I'm conscious, but I can't move my body, can't see, can't hear, and can't even smell anything. Am I stuck like this? I'm going to go crazy if I'm stuck like this. No way, no waaay.

Wait. What's that? I think I can hear something rustling. Okay, my ears work, good, good. That's a relief... except not, because I still can't move! If hearing is all that I can do then it's almost worse! I'm still trapped inside my own head!

Whack!

Ow! What? What?! Did something hit me? Wait! Pain! If I can feel pain, my sense of touch must be working! Okay, okay, calm down, get a grip. Breathe in, breathe out, listen to my body, figure out what else I've got. Maybe I jumped to the wrong conclusion with the "coma" thing.

I know I was just thinking that it felt like I was wrapped in something, so maybe I really am? Ha! I am! I'm all tied up! Ahaha!

This isn't really a laughing matter, though. I still have no idea what is happening. Have I been stuffed in a sack? Am I being kidnapped?

Wait, who the hell would want to kidnap a shut-in loser like me?

Anyhow. I should try to escape. I brace myself as best as I can and push hard against my bonds.

Crack!

Ah! Something broke! This doesn't really feel like a sack. What the hell is it? It's got this strange texture, kind of like it's both soft and brittle at the same time. Well, anyhow, I broke it, so I can clearly make it out just fine! Onward, to my escape!

Snap!

It's open, it's open! I crawl out, headfirst, into the open air... and come face to face with a swarm of giant spiders.

Ah. Aaah. AAAAAH?! What's with this army of giant spiders?! Every single one of them is as big as me! They're crawling out of some sort of egg-like things, one by one! This explains the noise! This explains that rustling noise!

I take a step back, involuntarily. My foot hits something and I turn to look at it. Is this... another egg? Isn't this where I just came from, though? Did I just crawl out of one of these eggs? It's not my imagination, right? This is the same kind of egg as the other ones that are spewing out that spider army, right? It certainly looks like it!

I try to look down at myself, just to see what I look like, but I can't turn my head for some reason. I try to turn my whole body, and my leg comes into view.

...It's a spider's leg.

AAAAAAAAAAH! CALM DOWN! CALM DOWN! CALM DOWN! Is this really... is this really what I think it is? Is this one of those reincarnated-as-an-RPG-monster stories that are currently in vogue on the internet? So! Show yourself, O godlike being who has whisked me to this strange world! Bestow upon me your favor so that I may right what has been wronged!

...Okay, no god appeared, maybe this isn't a novel. Not good, not good. Well, I guess I've read novels where there isn't some sort of god or fairy waiting for the hero upon her awakening, but then again in those it's usually the boy that gets to be the hero and the girl winds up as a haughty princess-type and that doesn't look like it's the case either. Great!

I take another quick look at myself. Arranged around me, I can see thin, wiry spider legs. I try to lift one up, and it moves exactly as I will it. These are my legs, all right.

Umf.

Well, this was fun, but I guess I should face reality: this is not a dream.

Somehow, I've been reborn as a spider.

Chapter 2: Looks like I'm somewhat monstrous

Well! It seems like I've been reincarnated as a spider. This sucks, but they do say that the first step towards solving a problem is admitting that problem exists. Step two: figure out what to do about it.

Crunch!

Disturbing noises snap me out of my thoughts. Ah, that's right, I'm still in trouble; better not lose track of reality. I'm still surrounded by an army of spiders (my siblings, I guess?), and now they're making strange sounds that I can't quite identify. I slowly turn back around to face them.

Crunch! Munch!

Wha?! What are they doing?! They're eating? They're eating each other?! Cannibalism! Before my eyes, my spider siblings engage in a gruesome battle for survival! This is bad! This is very bad! Brothers, sisters, why do you fight?

Ah, but it's food. It's food, and I'm hungry. To be quite honest, I'm probably about as hungry as these guys, and food is food...

Wait, no! I mustn't lose sight of reality again. I am but a pure, innocent young maiden! If I were to throw myself into that battle, surely I would be instantly ravaged by those men's evil intentions! ...Well, it's a metaphor, but the meaning is clear.

Fight

Items

Escape ←

It's times like these when one must withdraw. Me? Fight? Impossible. I've always been the quiet type who goes straight home after school, so thinking about diving in to such a violent crowd is insane! Even if I'm a spider just like those guys, I'm not going to jump in there.

Yeah, if I've got time to think about such impossible things, I've got time to start running away.

Thud.

A tremor from behind me ripples through the ground. Now what?! I turn around to see what new trouble I'm in. Towering over us all is an enormous spider. Is this Mother? (Or is it Father?) Mother, why are you so enormous? Aren't you far too large to exist? If spiders that were as large as you existed anywhere on Earth, wouldn't I have heard about it?

With a crunch, the giant spider spears one of my siblings with the mighty claw on her foreleg, then pops it into her mouth like a potato chip. Mother, no! Must you do such cruel things to us as well?

I have to get out of here. The time for thought is over, the time for action is now. Escape, find shelter, survive. GO!

I fled as fast as I could, not stopping until my legs gave out and I could no longer hear the sounds of carnage behind me. Now, looking around, it doesn't seem like anyone from the spider army followed me. Good. I seriously thought I was going to die back there. Dying immediately after being born, what a joke.

Now then! I'm not in immediate danger, so let's sit down and sort out everything I've got so far.

I'm a spider now, there's no doubt about it. I didn't take my physical fitness very seriously when I was still a human, so there's no way I could have jumped like I did back there, let alone run along the walls. I definitely wouldn't have been able to push my way straight through that many spiders.

Seriously, there were way too many spiders. That was like trying to fight my way through a crowd of crazed grandmothers, trying to get the last carton of eggs on discount day at the supermarket. Well, not like I'd ever have done something so reckless to begin with...

Anyhow, while I was escaping from the spider mosh pit, I found myself running along the walls and jumping like a ninja! It was very strange at the time, but despite having eight unfamiliar legs I had no trouble moving exactly the way I wanted to. It looks like my new body has some good basic instincts, which is great. The first good news I've had so far!

So, seriously, what was with that super-enormous spider? Was that really one of my parents? I don't really know much about the ecology of spiders, so maybe there are some spiders that eat their young. Regardless, if that's my parent, am I going to get that big someday?

...Now that I've had a chance to think about it, this might not be so bad after all. Spiders are useful little bugs, right? I could definitely be way more helpful to people now compared to when I was still a human. Wait, isn't that a sad thought? Shouldn't that make me sad? Maybe I'm thinking about this too much. Not good, not good...

I guess I might be misrepresenting the huge spider's true size. After all, it's only "huge" relative to me, and I don't really have any way to figure out how small I am. If I'm as tiny as a fingertip, then the big one's a much more reasonable size than I was originally thinking, probably about the size of a tarantula. On the other hand, if I'm tarantula-sized, then... that spider is bigger than anything that's ever been discovered on Earth. Come to think of it, it's not too far-fetched to think that it could be a strange new species; after all, reincarnation is already a pretty fantastical thing so there could definitely be other fantastical things around me. I should probably avoid being too optimistic...

I should verify this. First, let's try to figure out how small I really am. Is there something around here I could use as a comparison?

I survey my surroundings. It looks like I'm in a pretty big cave. There isn't very much light at all, but the murky gloom of the cave feels just about right to me. I look around cautiously.

Ah... aha! I've found bootprints! An unmistakable trail of bootprints, marked clearly in the earth! Even better: because there are bootprints, there are travelers, and because there are travelers, there are human beings living in this world! This realization brings up such emotions within me that I can hardly contain myself.

...Although, of course, now that I've found the bootprints, the... ah, uncomfortable truth is quite plain to see. This discovery is, um, not a very comforting one.

I'm definitely bigger than a footprint.

Yeah.

If I guess that the people who left these tracks were about 170 centimeters tall, then... I'm probably about one meter long, aren't I.

Ah, yeah. I've had this sneaking suspicion ever since I saw that giant spider. No matter how I look at it, I'm definitely not any kind of spider that's been seen on Earth before. In other words, even in this world that is quite clearly different from Earth, even if the lighting were good, if someone were to look at me, they'd be right to call me a monster!!

Ah, yeah. I've had this sneaking suspicion ever since I saw that giant spider, and this confirms it. No matter how I look at it, I can't be any sort of normal spider that I would have seen on Earth. That means that, even on this world that is quite clearly not Earth, even if one were to put it nicely, it would be very reasonable to call me a MONSTER, THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

Chapter 3: I used to think that Appraisal was OP

“I am a spider. As yet, I have no name.”¹

What, did that sound like it came out of nowhere? Don’t be surprised! I just wanted to see how it sounded out loud. After all, it seems like I really don’t have a name. What’s that? Why don’t I have a name? Ahhh, oops, I think I skipped ahead too much. Let’s rewind a little bit so that I can explain.

I am dumbfounded by how unbelievably large I am. That’s a normal reaction, right? I was already in shock from realizing that I had been reborn as a spider, and then I had to discover I’m a monster as well. This is overwhelming! Anyone would be in despair! Anyone would be driven to suicide!

Haha, well, it’s not like I’ve actually been thinking about my own death.

Well, I don’t really have time to be overwhelmed. After all, I don’t know where I am! This world is very different from the Earth I know, so I have no idea what sort of danger I could be in. Couldn’t there be other monsters out there that are just as scary as that enormous spider?

That spider, though. If I’m about one meter long, then that thing has to be around... thirty meters? Can a human even handle a spider that big? I really hope the people who left these bootprints don’t have to fight it. Ah, no, wait! Perhaps if they had heavy weapons they could have a chance! This is a fantasy setting, right? Maybe they’ve got some sort of high-powered attack magic! That would work, right?

Hmmm, I don’t know. I should definitely think of that spider as a boss monster, though. If I don’t, I probably won’t live very long.

I was just thinking that it wouldn't be so bad if those people fought that giant spider... but isn't that kind of wrong? After all, it seems like, you know, that monster is my mother. I'm her widdle monster baby!

Ahhh, yeah, this is no laughing matter. I'm a spider monster! If those people found me, wouldn't they try to kill me?

Yeahhh, probably. Definitely. What should I do? I want to know more about those people, but I know that if they find me I'm definitely toast.

Yeah, this is bad. I have way too little information about, well, everything. What kind of world is this? What are the people like? What kind of treatment do monsters like me tend to get? I want to know so many things but have no way to find them out.

Ugh! If this were anything like a novel, this is where the protagonist would start looking around using his Appraisal skill! That would be so conveni—

“You currently possess 100 skill points. The skill [Appraisal (LV 1)] can be acquired for 100 skill points. Would you like to acquire it now?”

What.

A mechanical voice suddenly started talking to me in my head. Ah, yeah, that makes sense. Complete sense.

Ahahaha! Of course! Of course this parallel world that I've been reincarnated into has such things! System messages! An Appraisal skill! This is great! I'm hype! I'm maximum hype! Yes! Yes! My answer is YES!

“You have acquired the skill [Appraisal (LV 1)]. You have 0 skill points remaining.”

I just spent all of my skill points in one go without any hesitation whatsoever. After all, I'll get more when I level up, right? This is fine. This is fine!

Because! Right! Now! I shall use my precious Appraisal skill to pull back the curtain on the mysteries of this world! ...

Ah, ahem, hold on. How do I use this thing? Let's, uh, let's try the standard method. I face a suitably interesting rock, concentrate, and think to myself, "Appraise".

Mmm! It feels like it's working! Information is streaming into my head!

Rock

.....Uh. Huh? Is that it? No, no, no, that can't be right. I must have screwed it up somehow, it was my first try, after all. I clear my mind and try again.

Rock

.....No. It can't be. That's it? That's really it? No, no, no, no! There has to be a better explanation. Perhaps this is merely an ordinary rock! Perhaps there is nothing useful to know about this rock at all! Let's try appraising the wall next. Perhaps doing so will tell me more about the place that I'm in! Even if it only says something like "The Cave of _____" or whatever, even that would be a relief!

Wall

.....I have no words.

Perhaps I should have thought this through more. It's right in the name, isn't it? "Appraisal, level one." It explicitly states, level one. What did I think was going to happen? I have just witnessed, first-hand, how useless a level one skill is. This might be useful if I managed to level it up... but, of course, I've spent all my skill points.

Aaaaagh! I'm an idiot! I'm a wasteful idiot! I blew all of my skill points on Appraisal without even bothering to check if there were any other skills! What if there's one that's actually usable at level one?

Wait, no, let's not beat myself up here. If Appraisal is this weak at level one, then none of the other skills should be any better. I'm going to assume that this is the case and move on. Yes, I'm moving on.

Ahhh. No waaay. Almost as an afterthought, I use Appraisal on myself.

Spider — (no name)

Huh? It says "spider" like I expected, but "no name"...?

And, that brings us back to the top. So, that's the gist of it. I don't have a name. Well, I have a name from my previous life, but the spider that I am now was never given a name.

For now, let's put aside this worthless Appraisal skill. Well, it's not quite worthless; it has revealed a bunch of new mysteries.

"Skill Points". These are probably points that I can save up to buy new skills. However, I have no clue how to earn them. Do creatures have levels in this world? Maybe if I raise my own level, I'll earn more skill points. This is just a theory, though.

Levels, skills, points... this world is just like a game, isn't it? Isn't it?

Regardless, I'm now a monstrous spider. Living a normal life is going to be completely impossible. Well, maybe I shouldn't think of a "normal life" in human terms, since I'm in such an unbelievable situation.² I've been reborn, as a spider, into a video game world! I'm a gamer, right? This will be fun! I'm going to enjoy this.

...First things first, though, I really do need to eat.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *These lines are referencing the opening lines of I Am a Cat, a famous Japanese novel. “I am a cat. As yet, I have no name.”*
2. *There's joke here that's difficult to translate directly: the protagonist says “I can't live a normal life”, then remarks that “life” (人生) contains the kanji for “person” (人), and that it would be more accurate to swap that out for “spider” (蜘蛛) to make “spider-life” (蜘蛛生).*

Chapter 4: For the first time in my (very short) life, I'm exploring a dungeon (that I was born in)

Well then! None of my problems will be solved if I just sit here forever, so I should get going.

I shouldn't follow these bootprints. Running into the people who made them would be a huge pain in the ass, so I really should go in the opposite direction.

...But, seriously, this cave is too big.

The ceiling towers over a hundred meters above me, and the section I'm in is probably about that wide as well. The craggy rocks scattered throughout the cave sometimes disguise its size, but as far as caves go, this one is enormous.¹

Currently, I'm at a sort of crossroad, where three wide tunnels join together in a Y. Behind me stretches the path I came from. The path where those footsteps lead goes off to one side, leaving me with only one path, which travels straight into the distance and out of sight. I climb on top of an especially large rock and survey the road ahead.

...What are THOOOSE?!

Scattered throughout the cave before me are countless monstrous creatures. Appraisal goes off accidentally.

...Well, uh, now that you mention it, I guess those do look kind of like deer... but the deer I'm familiar with definitely don't have horns that shine like swords. "Bat" could be used to

describe those creatures flapping around, but they look less like actual bats and more like extremely ugly rats that grew demonic wings. Looking at the wolves, you'd think they were almost normal by comparison, but then you see that they've got six legs. Even the dinosaur lying against the far wall looks weird: it's like a tyrannosaurus, but with horns and scales. That's not a dinosaur, that's a dragon!

Should I try to push my way through? It's doable, right? Haha, nooo, I'm just a tiny spider that was born just a little a while ago, so I really shouldn't do anything rash. The difficulty here is definitely set to Lunatic.

Stealthily, I creep down from my rock. What should I dooo? There's a huge pile of monsters in front of me, a spider-filled hell on one side, and potentially-hostile people on the other. Am I stuck here?

Ah, wait, hold up, please, no cause for alarm. Even though all three of these paths are blocked, I've already devised a grand strategy to advance! ...Ahaha, although I say "grand strategy", I really mean that I saw another passage while I was up on top of that rock. In addition to these hugely obvious passages that make up this Y-intersection, it looks like there's a much smaller side path through a fissure in the wall. It looks like it's about three meters high and three meters wide, and there's no problem getting there from here. No, the problem with this particular path is that this is where those bootprints come from. If those people came from this direction, then wouldn't that lead to this cave's (or, rather, this dungeon's) exit?

Umf. The exit, huuuh... should I really try to get out of here? If I were human, it would be obvious; I'd get out without a second thought. I mean, this dungeon is way too high-level for me! I don't really know how strong I am compared to other monsters, but that quick glance I got earlier told me that getting into combat would be a seriously bad idea.

Wellll, if this were really just a game I'd be all like "dying's not a big deal lol" but this is reality! I probably won't come back if I die, so there's no way I'd put my life on the line and charge madly into battle, not without any sort of fallback plan.

If I keep that in mind, getting out of here is a pretty attractive option. Well, it's comparatively attractive, but I really don't know if it's actually that good of an idea. After all, I'm a monster. Since people travel through this part of the dungeon, there must be some sort of human settlement nearby. If a big spider like me were to show up, they'd totally hunt me down. So, yeah, there's definitely risks going outside.

On the other hand, I might find a nice, quiet place to settle down somewhere out there. Staying out of sight of the people out there would be very luck-dependent, though... and, well, now that I say that, I should really also say that survival in here would be equally up to luck. Hmm...

Ah! Got it! For now, I'll set my sights on the dungeon's exit. Once I get there, I'll check out the state of affairs, see if there's anything dangerous like a base camp for the humans, and figure out if leaving is a good idea.

We have a plan, so, LET'S! GOOO!!

...I got lost, lol. :P

Well,ahaha, how should I put it... This cave is freaking huge! What is up with these labyrinthine paths? The road has been forking crazily all over the place ever since I started. How many branches, you ask? I lost count after 10!

I also encountered a ton of monsters! Every time, I ran away as fast as I could, but I think I got turned around and I have no idea where I am anymore. What happened to the footprints, you ask? I lost track of them a while ago!

Aaaaaahh, no waaaay. I'm lost in a maze and have no map. There's no way I'll find the exit!

Plus, I'm so hungry I can barely stand it. Someone, anyone, can you spare any food?

Chapter 5: Weaving a new home

I gave up on trying to get out of this dungeon. I half-heartedly thought about wandering around for a while, but with everything in this dungeon, I'm worried that an unexpected encounter would put the "dead" back in "dead end". It doesn't matter if it's a human or a monster, they're both seriously formidable foes. Oh, um, please don't misinterpret me; when I say "formidable foe" I don't mean in the sense of, hm, "a rival I want to beat", but more in the sense of "an extremely serious threat to my life".

Fortunately (or whatever if "fortunate" isn't a good word to describe my current situation), there aren't any monsters here that are faster than me, so dodging unpleasant encounters is quite easy. My spider body has agility in spaces! I'm far, far faster than I was as a human.

Ah, sorry, I'm getting too full of myself. While it's true that I am quite fast, it is really all of my physical capabilities that are far, far greater than those in my previous life. Heh.

Well, before I was reincarnated, I really was more of the indoors-y type. "Exercise? What's that?", etc., etc. It's obvious that a wild spider would have better stats than I did before. The only parts of my body that I had bothered to hone were my thumbs, made strong by countless hours of gaming.

Let's set aside the topic of my former unathleticism. What matters now is that, in my current body, I'm pretty good at running away. Of course, running away all the time is not a really solid survival strategy. If I'm caught from both sides in a pincer attack I'm done for, and if I run into anything faster than me I'd be screwed, although I haven't seen anything like that yet.

Plus, I've been steadily growing hungrier and hungrier, and you can't fight on an empty stomach. Well, not being able to fight isn't really the problem, since I'd really rather I didn't have to. It's the "empty stomach" part that's the issue. I'd rather not starve to death.

Well, then, let's think about this for a bit. Q: What do spiders eat? A: Other bugs.

Oof... that's right, isn't it... if I'm going to sate my appetite that's what I'm looking at, isn't it... and since I'm so big, that's going to reduce my options for prey, isn't it... Specifically, my options are other monsters and, although I don't really want to think about it, humans.

I mean, my siblings got into cannibalism immediately after being born, didn't they, and that giant spider that seemed like our parent was also calmly eating its own children. It seems like the average member of my species thinks that everything on the planet apart from itself is prey. It's not like there's many other options, though, in this cave.

What do those deer-like monsters in that big passage eat? Are they carnivores, disguised as herbivores? ...man, I can't stop thinking about food. I am seriously worried about where I'm going to find my next meal.

It's time to face the facts. At this rate, I will starve to death. That's a bad thing, so I'm going to have to put up with eating whatever junk I can scrounge up. Ugh. I need to prepare myself.

It's all well and good to prepare myself, though, but step one is really figuring out what it is I'm going to be eating. Of course, there's nothing edible on hand, which means I need to go acquire myself some provisions. Now, how will I do that?

To be frank, my odds of winning in a fight are basically zero. Sure, the passages in this maze I'm in now are smaller than the huge ones from before. Sure, there's no monsters that seem absolutely unbeatable, like that giant spider or whatever that dragon-like thing was. The monsters here are only about person-sized!

Even still, it's probably not possible for me to win a fight. Why, do you ask? I have no idea how! I've never fought anything IRL before! If this was a game, I'd probably win, but pressing buttons is way different from actually moving my body. Plus, 2D and 3D are way different.

I shouldn't really be concerned about not being able to fight, though. I'm really hungry, but not to the point where I might keel over at any moment. So, since I've got a little time to prepare, let's come up with a properly spider-like way to secure me some food.

When you're talking about spiders, you have to talk about webs! Weaving a web out of sticky spider silk and ensnaring prey is totally spider-like, and a cave is a perfect place to do it, since I can stick my threads everywhere.

I have decided! Here, I shall build my new home!

First, I have to make some thread. That comes out of my butt (or whatever you call it now), right? Let's try making some.

...now that I'm paying attention, it looks like I've already got some thread. Huh?! How'd that get there? Wouldn't I remember spewing that stuff out?

Hmm. This stuff stretches all the way back the way I came. Have... have I been laying thread the entire time I've been walking around?! Aaah, this is embarrassing!! It looks like I have to focus on turning it off.

Yeeeeeah. What should I do about all this thread? I might find a use for it in the future but for now let's cut it off and get back to work.

Let's try this again... here, I shall build my new home! I've got the basics down on making thread. Now, I need to stick my thread all around the cave. I like to think I'm pretty handy, but can I pull this off?

...before I was even finished thinking that, I'd already done it. In the blink of an eye, I'd built quite a satisfactory web. This tunnel is now quite magnificently covered with an enormous spiderweb. Whoa, is this my body's instinct? As soon as I started, my body started moving like it knew exactly what it needed to do as I watched dumbfounded.

I've made my web in two parts. The top and bottom halves are separated from each other by a one-meter gap. Why, you ask? I definitely wouldn't want to cut off my own escape route, would I?

My new home is at a T-intersection, so I've built a web in each of the tunnels. I've made sure to leave a hole in each of them so that I can escape, since if I were to block them off completely I'd be trapped. I don't think there's anyone around here strong enough to break spider's silk, so I feel fine leaving these little holes.

The stupid monsters that crawl on the ground will get stuck in my lower web. The ones that try to jump or fly over it will get caught in my upper one. I've closed off all entrances, so I'm perfectly safe in here, and just in case something does break in I've left myself escape routes. Isn't this the perfect kind of place for a shut-in like me? This wonderful place I'll call my home.

Chapter 6: I munched and I crunched and I have no regrets

Note: The following chapter contains a scene depicting predation. Reader discretion is advised.¹

My new home feels so safe and secure that I dozed off before I knew it, but when the threads I had connected to my leg started to vibrate, I woke up with a start. I was kind of hoping that when I woke up I'd find that all this had been a dream, but, nope, I'm still a spider in a cave. Oh well, there goes that.

I stretch out all eight my legs as I stand up, and they rustle as they move. This is kind of gross, if I do say so myself.

Now that I'm awake, I turn my attention towards the vibrating thread. This one is attached to the lower web on the passageway to my left. It looks like, somehow, something's gotten stuck in it!

My first prey.

I carefully approach until I can see what I've caught. Tangled in the net is something whose skin is a crazy pattern of rainbow-colored dots.

Frog

Yeah, this definitely looks like a frog. Sure, it's about as big as I am, and it glitters like a rainbow, but it's a frog. This is the first time I've agreed with what Appraisal has told me about a monster. ...Well, excepting me, since it said I'm a spider.

A frog, huh... for my first catch, wasn't this a bit too easy? We don't eat anything like this in Japan, but I know there's parts of the world where people eat strange stuff like this all

the time. I even remember hearing that spiders taste like chicken. I was thinking just a little while ago that I'd have to eat really disgusting food to survive, but this isn't actually so bad! If I can't bring myself to eat this, I'm probably never going to be able to eat anything else in this dungeon.

There's a slight problem, though. This frog is probably poisonous, hmm... well, no, with this vibrant color pattern, it's almost certainly poisonous. What should I do...

As I casually sit here and ponder, the frog who has been so desperately struggling against my webs launches its counterattack! It vomits up a stream of brightly-colored, poisonous-looking liquid, directly at me! Ahhh! I was too busy thinking about how to kill it that I didn't notice! It's far too late to dodge! I get covered by the noxious fluid.

Aaaargh!

Wh, what is this?! Ouch! Ouch! Is this venom? It's venom! I'm covered in venom!

Oh no, it's shooting again! Wait, wait, I'm not read— OW! I'm hit again! This pain is no joke! Retreat! Retreeeat! I run out of the frog's range, almost tripping over my own legs.

Whoa. This really hurts. Is this what it feels like to get splashed by acid? It's melting my body, isn't it? I don't have a mirror, so I can't see for certain, but this is making me pretty nervous.

Shit. I messed that up. I forgot that the thing I had caught was a monster, and I got careless. "A rat is the most dangerous when it's cornered," isn't it? A frog being hunted by a snake isn't going to just let itself be eaten.

Ahhh, well, this really hurts, but it doesn't feel like I'm going to die. The venom mostly just hit my left side. My left eye got hit and doesn't seem to be working that well anymore, so there's a chunk missing from my field of view. ...huh? My left eye got hit, but there's only a little bit missing from my field of view...? Ah, I know! Since I'm a spider, I've got eight eyes, right? Yeah, probably. This is good to know.

Well, it doesn't matter for now. This pain isn't really going away.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Acid Resistance (LV 1)].”

Whuh? The pain suddenly lessens a bit. The voice said “skill”... does this mean that I can gain skills without spending points? Why the hell did I spend a hundred points on Appraisal?! ...ugh, let's not think about this too hard.

Anyhow, it looks like I've acquired a skill that reduces acid damage. If I had to guess, I'd say I got it from taking that frog's attack. The requirements must be a bit higher than that, though, because I didn't get it immediately after getting hit. The likely answer is that, since the acid stuck to me, I kept taking damage until I met the “proficiency requirements” that voice mentioned. Right?

Let's think about this later. I've picked up some resistance, and the pain has gone down a bit. I think I'm about ready to go face that frog again. After all, it's really pissing me off. It's only food! How dare it attack me! Unforgivable! I have decided. I don't care if it's poisonous or not, I am going to eat that thing!

With that, it's time to charge in! If I don't get careless, this will be easy: it's already my prey, caught helplessly in my trap!

The frog fires a third shot at me. Heh, don't be so predictable, you're making this too easy! I dodge past the stream of acid as I approach, and let loose my own attack. Take this, frog, my special technique!

CRUNCH!

How do you like my bite, frog? Ohohoho, don't think this is any ordinary bite! I am a spider! My fangs are covered in deadly venom! (I figured this out when I realized I could make silk.) Ohohohooo, feel my venom coursing through your veins and dieeee!

Splash!

HAAAARGH!

You spit acid at me as I'm biting you?! Ow! Ow! Even with the resistance, this still really hurts! Ow!

My fangs open accidentally as I reel back.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Resistance (LV 1)], has been raised to level 2.”

Ahhh, is that so?

Wait, not now, announcer lady! This frog has, not once, not twice, but THREE times covered me with its filthy venom! This is unforgivable! Even though I had no intention of sparing you in the first place, this is absolutely unforgivable!

I attack once again, empowered by my own fury. The frog writhes in agony. Ahaha! Suffer! Suffeeeeer! I bite it, gleefully, again and again. The frog thrashes about in pain, but in time its movements grow weak and feeble, then finally stop.

Heh. I finally defeated you. If this was my first hunt, I can tell things are only going to get tougher from here. But, for now, I did it! Yes! Time to eat!

Munch, munch, slurp, slurp. Umf, this is bitter. Painful, too. Is this bitterness from the poison? The pain's from the acid, right? Well, I've got some resistance now, so this isn't going to kill me. I can bear with it, but, ugh, this isn't tasty at all.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Acid Resistance (LV 1)], has been raised to level 2.”

This meat may be disgusting, but this skill rank sure is sweet.

Chapter 7: 24/7 Vacation!

Ahh, I'm stuffed. Maybe it's because I was so hungry, or maybe it's because I need nutrients to recover from all this damage I took, but I somehow managed to eat the entirety of a frog that was almost as big as my entire body. What, that sounds like it's physically impossible? Hah hah hah, what are you saying? In this world where such mysterious phenomena as "skills" exist, you can't say that!

In fact, eating all that has caused me to swell up like a balloon. Ahhh, if I were still a human, I'd be thinking of going on a diet, wouldn't I... Come to think of it, though, when I was a human, I never really got fat even with my messed-up eating habits, so dieting isn't really in my vocabulary anyway.

First things first, let's repair the part of the net that the frog got tangled up in. Ugh, this is going to suck with my belly so heavy and swollen...

It was a struggle, but I've mended my web. No other monsters showed up while I was working, which is good! Hmm, wasn't I also way too unprotected while I was eating the frog, too? There definitely might have been some monsters nearby that would have been lured by the smell of blood. I haven't seen them in these smaller tunnels, but what about those six-legged wolves from before? Their sense of smell is probably great. I'm going to have to make sure to bring my prey back into my home before I start eating, next time.

Ahhh, I've finally taken care of the basic necessities of life: food and shelter.¹ Hm? What about clothing? You're telling a spider to put on clothing? Ha. I don't think that's really necessary, since the temperature in here is really kind of pleasant, and I'm covered in short hairs that keep me comfortable. Plus, I don't even have anything to wear! I mean, I guess I could weave something out of my silk, but I don't think that's a very good use of my time. Even if I were to make something, how would I even put it on?

For the time being, can't I just ignore clothing? Ohh, if I do that, I've got everything on lockdown without having to work for it at all! Well, no, I guess did have to build my home

in the first place, and fighting the frog was a ton of effort, so I guess you could say that I had to work for it, huh...

...Well, as long as nothing big happens, this environment seems pretty safe. There's only really a couple things that could mess this up: someone coming through and busting down my webs, and a lack of prey coming through here and getting caught. The first one isn't so bad, since if some brave warrior comes through here knocking down my webs I can just run away and rebuild elsewhere. The second one, hm... if prey keep coming around regularly, I'll definitely be able to live my perfect shut-in lifestyle.

This is wonderful! I was definitely a huge shut-in in my previous life. When I had to go to school, I'd sit in the back of the class and avoid talking to anyone, and when the bell rang I went straight home and spent the rest of the day surfing the net and playing games. Dinner was either the kind you added hot water to and let sit for three minutes or the kind you threw in the microwave. Occasionally I'd grab something prepackaged from the convenience store, just for variety.

My parents both worked, and they came home super late, so we never really saw each other, let alone had any sort of conversation. I did the minimum amount of housework necessary to keep them off my back. To be frank, they were really just complete strangers that happened to live in the same house as me.

Thanks to that isolated lifestyle, I've always found communicating with other people to be fairly troublesome. ...Well, maybe it wasn't just my lifestyle, maybe I was just born with that kind of personality. But, thanks to all that, I didn't have any friends. Even when I played MMOs, I rarely bothered chatting with other players.

As a result, my MMO characters tended to be the distant, silent type. I usually played a middle-aged bald dude, the kind of nice guy who wouldn't say much and let his actions do the talking. Stats and skills all seemed useless, so I poured everything into raising my physical attack damage and my speed, ignoring everything else. Combat was always hit-and-run; "just try and lay a finger on me," you know, that kind of thing. I dodged every attack that came at me, since my complete lack of defense meant that I would absolutely die if I got hit.

Umf. I don't care that I might not ever see my parents or my classmates again, but I'm going to miss that old bald dude. In free-to-play MMOs, a free character able to beat the paid players is a pretty spectacular sight, and it's a shame he's just going to quietly disappear.

I had more attachment to my game characters than I did to my parents. I was a terrible human being, wasn't I? Well, it's the truth. Are those people even going to be sad that I died? Ah, whatever, it doesn't matter either way. If I were in their shoes I don't think I'd mourn. I'd probably think that putting together the funeral would be a pain!

If I were to say this to anybody else they'd probably get pissed, but, really, so what? I wasn't bothering anyone, so it's really none of your business. I was bothering my parents? Hah, no, I played the stock market in my free time, which gave me enough money to live off of. Once you get a feel for it and get used to taking the risks, you can make a pretty decent living off of it. So, I definitely wasn't bothering my parents. I wasn't bothering anyone, so I didn't need to talk to anyone.

Ah, well, listen to me ramble on about things that don't matter anymore. Let me summarize in a grand declaration:

Shut-in losers are the best!

Author's note: Please do not attempt this at home. This is a work of fiction, and the opinions of the characters are not those held by the author.

Chapter 8: A spider without intelligence is just a normal spider

Zzzzz. Yaaaaawn! Ahhh, I slept a ton! Did I oversleep? I'm feeling a little sluggish. Ahh, well, sleeping without a care in the world is the best!

How long did I sleep? Well, in my previous life I tended to sleep for about four hours a day. This, though, feels more like the time where I passed out from lack of sleep and slept through an entire day. It's hard to tell, though... humans and spiders are very different creatures, so I don't really have any way to figure out how long I was actually asleep. Yeahhh, I want a clock.

How long has it even been since I was born? I've got a vague sense that it's been two, maybe three days, but since I'm in a dungeon it's not like I can use daylight to tell.

I don't even know what kind of calendar this world uses! Maybe one day isn't actually twenty-four hours. On Earth, a year is the length of time it takes the planet to go around the sun, and a day is the time it takes for it to spin around its axis. Does this planet have exactly the same size and mass of Earth, and does it spin around its star at the same rate? It's pretty unlikely. Ah, well, that's just the explanation according to science, but in this magical parallel world, it's not entirely impossible that we're operating under entirely different laws of physics.

It's not like I can really verify it either way, though. If I ever leave this place some day I might look into it, but for now I'll just enjoy this lackadaisical lifestyle to the fullest. ...Well, maybe instead of lazing about, I should try thinking about some of the unanswered questions I've collected until now.

First off, how did I die? Ah, hm, now that I think about it, I've basically just been assuming that I'm dead. I've been working under the assumption that I suddenly died and was reincarnated as a spider, but I don't actually remember dying.

Hm?

The last thing I remember was being in Japanese Lit. Our teacher, Oka¹, was in the middle of reading something aloud, right? I was drowsily nodding off, then suddenly there was a blast of blinding pain, then I don't remember anything after that. If I did die, it was most likely because of all of that pain, but I don't know what could have hurt so bad to begin with.

Well, the most likely theory is that I died from that mysterious pain, then I was reincarnated as a spider. If I didn't die, I could... merely be possessing this spider while my real body is comatose in a hospital bed? Oh, and this one's even crazier, but it could be that I'm a completely different person with a copy of my old memories, and my original self is still stuck in literature class.

Hmmm, I'm sure that if I kept thinking I could come up with even crazier ideas. If I wasn't really me, how would I prove it? I could try saying incomprehensible things like "I am me, therefore I am me," or whatever... It's hard to believe, but reincarnation is the simplest explanation I've come up with, so I'm going to stick with that for now. "I think, therefore I am," right? Let's just assume that I'm me.

Next up, this body that I'm in. A spider's body is surprisingly convenient! I'm not having any trouble moving around on my eight legs, and it's actually way easier for me to move around as a spider than as a human. I can run along walls, and, absurdly, can even walk along the ceiling. I've got a few weaknesses, though. I don't have hands, and I can't look behind me without turning around.

Not having hands is a real pity. I could use my front legs to grip things, but it's really a poor substitute. I won't have anywhere near the same precision or finesse that I did with my human hands. Plus, my legs each end in a single sharp claw, and there's no way something so dangerous could be used in place of a finger. It's a shame, but I'll be able to manage somehow.

There's only one really big problem: I can't see what's behind me.

This is extremely dangerous. Spiders don't have necks, so my head is attached directly to the rest of my body and can't turn independently. I've got plenty of eyes, so my field of view is actually quite large even if I can't turn my head, but I've got no way to see what's behind me at all. I'm incredibly vulnerable to a surprise attack.

I might try using my threads as a countermeasure. Since I can't see behind me, I'll need to rely on some other sense, and if I can keep threads spread out behind me, I could use my sense of touch to tell if there's something behind me. Ahh, well, easier said than done. I need more practice with my threads. I'm safely hiding in my home, so I don't really need an early-warning system, but better safe than sorry.

Lastly, skills. There's a million little things I want cleared up, but for now let's just focus on the big one: what the heck is a "skill"?

If I'm using game logic, a skill is some kind of ability or technique. The kinds of actions you can perform are based on the skills you have, so as you acquire more skills you can do more things. However, I don't know if this world treats skills the same way, so I shouldn't make any assumptions.

My first priority is figuring out what skills I have, and what skills I can acquire.

I have three skills that I know about: [Appraisal (LV 1)], [Acid Resistance (LV 2)], and [Poison Resistance (LV 2)]. I bought Appraisal with skill points. Those are a mystery too, huh. I spent all of my points on Appraisal, but I have no idea how to get more. If this were a game, I'd get more when I leveled up, but I don't know if this world even has things like levels. It could be that I'll get more as time passes.

Worst-case scenario? Never getting any more. Skill points may just be something an individual is born with, and you only get to spend them once. Ahh, that would be shockingly awful.

I hope that's not true!

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *A nickname.*

Chapter 9: Skill Inspection

Umf. Let's forget about skill points for now, since there's really no point in me worrying if I can get more of them.

Acid Resistance, huh. I got that through an entirely different method than when I picked up Appraisal. "Acid Resistance" does what it says: it makes me more resilient to acid. I got it when that annoying frog shot his acid spit all over me.

That saliva attack was probably both acid-type and poison-type. When I got hit by it, I took acid damage, which led to automatically acquiring the Acid Resistance skill. Was it because I took damage in general, or was it because it had an "acid" attribute? I also can't tell if it's because I took a certain amount of damage, or because I kept taking acid damage, or even if it was just a certain amount of time after I took the first attack.

Well, what's important here is that once I take damage of a particular type, I start to gain resistance to it. It might sting for a bit, but if I can endure it, I'll get a new skill out of it. If I took a fire attack, I'd get fire resistance, right? When I'm thinking about my defense strategies, I should make sure I think about acquiring new resistances. If I see a new attack that doesn't look like it will straight-up kill me, should I let myself get hit by it? Hmm, no, getting hurt sucks, and there's no guarantee I'll gain a new resistance after just one attack. Ah, it's not just because I don't like pain: it's always better not to take any unnecessary risks.

I got Acid Resistance when I got hit by that frog's attack, but my Poison Resistance leveled up as well. If what the, uh, "Voice of Heaven" said was true, then I had Poison Resistance from the start. Well, that makes sense: I'm a spider, and I use poison, so of course I should have resistance. Do I have any other natural skills like that? I don't think I have any way to check! If the "Voice of Heaven" hadn't mentioned it, I wouldn't even know that I have Poison Resistance to begin with! There's probably loads of other spider skills that I don't know that I have.

Ahh, this is a mystery... what else could I have? I might have some sort of “Poison Strike” skill. It would be great if I could know for sure, but, y’know, I have no way to check.

Just to test, I whisper “Character Statistics” to myself, but there’s no response. Maybe if Appraisal’s level were higher, I could check. ...Wait. Appraisal’s level... level as in... proficiency, maybe? Ah, is this a way for me to level Appraisal up?

Proficiency means the degree to which someone has mastered a skill, right? If Appraisal uses the same system as my resistance skills, then becoming more proficient at it will cause it to level up. Thus, if I use it a bunch, I should get better at it, and it will level up, right? Haha! I thought that since I bought it with skill points I’d have to spend more skill points to level it up, but I might have jumped to conclusions!

I immediately start spamming Appraisal on everything I can see. Tons of useless information like “wall” and “floor” starts pouring into my brain. Ah, this is a pretty terrible feeling, like I’m getting drunk on this deluge of information.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 1)], has been raised to level 2.”

WORTH IT! Woohoo! It’s just one level, but it worked! This is a huge step forward. Trembling a little bit, I Appraise myself.

Small Lesser Taratekt — (no name)

Ohhh! Now it’s even displaying my species! As before there’s not very much information at all, but it’s way better than the generic “spider” label I got out of it before.

But, hm. I’m not just “small”, but also “lesser”, huh... it’s like I’m inferior, or something. What a downer! I was so happy after I got Appraisal to finally level up, but, seriously, “lesser”? I didn’t have any high hopes or anything, but I certainly wasn’t expecting to be lesser! Ugh, well, since I was such a loser in my previous life, I guess it’s only natural that this would carry forward.

...Well then, time to Appraise everything else and get its level up even higher!

It's not leveling up. I've used it on every single wall and crag and rock I can see, and its level hasn't even gone up once. On top of that, where Appraisal had said "wall" before, now it says "labyrinth wall", which is... not particularly helpful. That's not the important part though: why isn't this leveling up at all?!

Hmmmm. Well, the first thing that comes to mind is that maybe Appraising something multiple times doesn't cause me to gain any proficiency. That's probably the case, otherwise it would be way too easy for me to grind it out in the safety of my home. Just to be sure, I Appraise everything around me again, but, sure enough, the level doesn't go up, almost like I'm not actually getting more proficient.

If that's true, then in order to level Appraisal, I'm going to need to Appraise things that are outside my home, huh... Didn't I Appraise a bunch of monsters back when it was still level one? I must have gotten a bunch of proficiency back then.

Going outside, though... what a pain. I have such a nice home here, why should I force myself to go out? It's way better to just stay here, living safely in my little web, although I guess I'm not going to get any skill ranks like this. I guess there's pros and cons, but all of the danger that I might face outside is a pretty serious con.

Yeah. I've decided. Let's stay here for a little bit longer and enjoy this lazy lifestyle until I'm sick of it. It's not like the hand of God will come down upon me if I slack off a little, right?

Chapter 10: Level Up!!

While I was lazing about in my home¹, my threads started to vibrate. It looks like I've caught my second victim! Good timing, too, I was just starting to get hungry. I approach my prey with a skip in my step. ...Honestly, though, a skipping spider is a little bit too surreal.

Last time, I was a little too careless and walked straight into my opponent's counterattack. This time, I approach much more cautiously. Now then, what do we have here?

Elro Frog

Oh, my stars and garters! Ain't this another frog? How in the heck'd this happen?! Ain't there a right pile of other monsters in this here dungeon?! Why'd I get the lousy luck of seeing this sucker twice?!

Haah, haah, hah. I dropped into my fake Southern accent, didn't I. Seriously, why'd th...

Splash!

NOOOOOOOOO!

While I was busy doing my one-man standup routine the frog spewed acid on me. I can't believe it took me two lives to figure this out: I am a huge idiot!

Ahh, yeah, the pain helped me calm down a little bit. This time, my Acid Resistance level didn't go up, so I guess my skill proficiency wasn't raised enough. Well, that's okay for now.

I wrap the helpless frog up in my silk until it can't move an inch, and bite it. Crunch. Just like last time, this frog doesn't die from one bite; perhaps they have poison resistance. Even still, the frog grows weaker as it struggles against its bonds. I quickly drag it into my home, then spend some time fixing my broken webs.

All right, all done here. I turn my attention back to the frog as it rolls around helplessly on the floor. Looks like one bite isn't going to cut it.

Crunch!

I bite it again. Last time I wound up biting the frog over and over, but if you think about it that's probably not necessary. My fangs are coated in venom, so biting it a couple times and letting my venom do the work is just fine.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Fang (LV 1)], has been raised to level 2.”

Oh! A skill leveled up! And it's one I've never seen before, too. The frog stopped moving almost immediately after my skill leveled, which was a little bit surprising. Ah, but this makes sense: if my Poison Fang skill increased, then my poison must have gotten stronger as well. That's very nice!

“Experience requirements met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you have grown from level 1 to level 2.”

Hm?

Hmmmm?

Ah! Something feels weird!

Uh?! What's this?! My skin is peeling off! Am I molting? I'm molting!

“Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Poison Resistance (LV 2)] skill has been raised to level 3 and your skill [Spider Silk (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Mmmm! No! W, wait up! That sounded really important! I was busy, and you were mumbling at me when I wasn't paying attention! Please, say it again! One more time!

Silence.

Oof. Seriously? Ah, no, no, let's keep calm and try to remember. She said "level up," right? I wasn't hearing things? Aaah, I really wasn't paying attention, since I was unexpectedly shedding all of my skin at the time! No, wait, now that I think about it, isn't spontaneously molting kind of unusual to begin with? I wonder if this is an effect of leveling up. Did my body change at all?

For now, let's get the rest of this dead skin off of me. Whoa, check out this huge wound that was on my back! That must be from when I got hit by that frog's acid earlier. I couldn't see it at the time, but this looks really serious. Hm? Now that I'm thinking about being able to see things, it looks like that hole in my field of vision got repaired! Ohhh! I must get fully healed when I level up!

Yep. This is, without a doubt, leveling up. I feel so light and refreshed, like everything is in perfect harmony. This must have been caused by gaining experience after killing the frog, yeah? Ah, right, the frog, I should be eating. Multitasking, right.

Okay, so, let's try to remember everything, in order. The first line was definitely about my level going up. I started to molt immediately after that, so I really wasn't paying that much attention while the "Voice of Heaven" kept mumbling. Remember, remember... ah! Skills! There was something about my skills going up, right? Not just once, but two at a time right? ...what's up with that?

Oh! Right! There was something right before the skills. Something about... bonus proficiencies? Ah! Right! Bonus proficiencies from leveling up, or basically bonus points that I get for free whenever I level! That would explain why two skills leveled up simultaneously.

The skills that went up were, hm... Poison Resistance and... Spider Silk? Hmm, even my silk is from a skill, huh...? I only really found out about it when I leveled, though. Hmm, if

I just keep spinning thread, this is going to be super easy to level up. This is great information!

Also, when I leveled, I was fully healed. It feels kind of like my stats have gone up too. But the most important thing is that I get bonus skill proficiency when I level! I don't know how much I get, but since I got ranks in two different skills at the same time, it's probably a pretty decent amount, right? Looks like getting levels is a pretty efficient way of getting skill ranks as well.

Levels, though. I was kind of hoping that they existed since I found out about skills, but they seriously exist! This world really is like a game, though I try not to treat it as such. Living my life as if I were in a game is kind of a scary concept, you know? It might be a bit too late, though. I can't help but already be a little bit excited about all of this. After all, I'm a gamer down to my core.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *The actual line here is more literally translated as “while I was drunk off my ass in my home...” but that doesn’t make any sense in-context. The author uses the onomatopoetic expression グデグデ (dead drunk) here, but last chapter he used グダグダ (exhausted, tired). I’m assuming this is a typo, or a pun that I’m not catching, and have translated it as such.*

Side Story 1: The final day of our ordinary lives

It had been an extremely ordinary day. All I expected to do was go to school, hang out with my friends, go home, play some games, take a bath, and go to sleep. That, at least, was how it was supposed to go.

I walked to school, rubbing sleep out of my eyes. I stayed up way too late last night playing an MMO, and I was paying the price this morning. I had somehow managed to get into a party with Baldy, and I completely lost track of time as we farmed dungeon after dungeon.

Baldy, by the way, was a kind of famous character in the MMO that I played. He was a quiet, older gentleman with a bald head who pushed the limits of what can be accomplished as a free-to-play character. He completely ignored status and romance, focusing instead on raising his physical ability to its extreme. He was a ridiculously amazing player, too, able to dance around the front lines of a battle without breaking a sweat. On top of that, he barely ever said a word in chat. His quiet, almost manly playstyle made him very popular with other players. I finally managed to get into a party with him, so it was only natural that I got a little too excited stayed up way too late.

I arrive at school, stifling a yawn as I enter the classroom.

“Hey,” says my classmate Kyouya as I get to my desk.

“Oh, hey,” I reply.

“Yo!” says Kanata, “Whoa, what’s up? You look awful.”

Kyouya Sasajima and Kanata Ooshima were two of my classmates. We played a bunch of the same MMOs, so we were pretty good friends.

“Oh, yeah, check this out. Last night I got into a party with Baldy.”

“Whoa, seriously?”

“Yeah, seriously,” I reply. “I stayed up waaay too late playing with him.”

“Wow, I’m jealous. That was after I quit?” asked Kanata. We’d been playing together, but he had to go to bed and logged out well before I did. “Fuck, if I knew that was going to happen I would have stayed on a little longer.”

Kanata seemed really upset with himself, but in truth we never would have seen Baldy without him. We needed another person to fill the slot Kanata had left, and Baldy answered our messages in LFG.

“So, you really saw Baldy, huh? What’s he like?” asked Kyouya.

Memories of Baldy’s gallant figure flashed through my mind. “That man cannot be human,” I said. “Can you believe that he was able to advance while completely dodging the Bezebel Witch’s spells?”

The Bezebel Witch was a particularly nasty boss found in high-level dungeons. She was known for firing out a ludicrous barrage of magic attacks. The forums keep calling it a bullet hell. The worst part about this boss is that she never stopped firing. Attackers would be hit by wave after unceasing wave of magic blasts. Ordinarily, what you would try to do is either massively buff your magic resistance and try to whittle her down via suicide attacks, or set up a super-defensive front-line and fire equally large swarms of magic back at her.

Baldy, on the other hand, dodged every blast, got close, and killed her with melee damage. This was completely and utterly unexpected. My mouth actually hung open as I watched him go.

“Wow, that’s Baldy for you. I guess that’s why people call him Kartikeya¹,” said Kyouya.

“Man, you have to have serious skill to pull off a crazy stunt like that,” said Kanata, tapping his arm. Certainly, I know that if I had the same stats and gear that Baldy had, I wouldn’t be able to do anything like that. “Man, I want to get better!”

“Want to grind out a few more levels after school?” I ask.

“Yeah, definitely!”

“Me too. Let’s find a particularly nasty place and train a bunch.”

“Hm?” I said as I rummaged around in my bag, trying to find my pencil case. I realized, a bit too late, that I had taken it out so that I could write down a few notes as I was playing last night and never put it back. “Ah, crap...”

“What’s wrong?” asked Yuika Hasebe, who was sitting next to me in class.

“I forgot my pencil!”

“Oh no, sorry to hear that. Would you like to borrow mine?” she asked, holding up a spare mechanical pencil.

I took it, gladly. “You’re a lifesaver.”

“You owe me one!”

“Haha, okay,” I said, smiling wryly.

That promise was not one I would be able to keep.

It happened in the middle of literature class, while I was fighting valiantly against falling asleep. Our very short teacher, who we affectionately called Oka-chan, was standing at the

front of the class, textbook in one hand, reciting some sort of classical poem. Most of the class was reading along in their own textbooks.

In an effort to stay awake, I forced myself to look up. In the row in front of me, I saw Spooky, another one of my classmates. Spooky wasn't her real name, but she looked like she belonged in a haunted house so we called her that. She was extremely gaunt, deathly pale, always wore a gloomy expression, and was generally a creepy sort of girl. I felt bad thinking about her like that, but there wasn't really any polite way to put it. As if she was mocking my efforts to stay awake, Spooky was fast asleep at her desk. I made myself look away.

That's when it happened.

It was kind of like a fissure, floating in the empty air in the middle of the classroom, that nobody seemed to have noticed but me. It was hard to describe it as anything else but a crack in space. It was growing, too, and looked like it was going to split open at any moment. I saw it spreading through the air above me, but couldn't do anything but stare blankly at it. Even if I had reacted differently, I don't think there's anything I could have done about what happened next.

In an instant, the space around us shattered in a blast of glorious light, and I was enveloped by blinding pain. That's when I — no, we — died.

Translator's notes for this chapter

1. *Kartikeya* is the Hindu god of war, known, among other things, for his speed. His Japanese name is *Idaten* (竜跡天).

Chapter 11: Spinnin' some threeeead, spinnin' some threeeead! ♪

I've got some thread wound around my forelegs. It stretches when I pull them apart, and snaps back together when I relax. Awesome. It's stretchy like rubber, just as I was hoping.

What am I doing? Glad you asked. Ever since I found out that my spider silk has a skill associated with it, I've been trying various experiments to raise my proficiency. Until now, I haven't really been trying to use my threads for anything but building webs and tying up my prey, so I truly had no idea what these were capable of.

Hm? What happened to going outside and leveling up, you say? Haha, as if. I may have gotten a little bit excited immediately after I leveled up, but after I calmed down I realized how foolish it was. Think about it: I'm a girl who's only good at video games. Do you seriously think I'd be good in a real fight? As if. I might have a monster's body, but I still barely know how to move it.

There's a world of difference between playing a game and actually moving my body. For starters, a game character doesn't get tired, while a real body runs out of stamina if you move too much. Back on Earth, for instance, I was a very frail girl who got tired just walking to and from school. If I had to fight a monster with real, natural-born monster instincts, I think it would be very difficult for me to win, wouldn't it?

Therefore, my current plan of letting prey get stuck in my webs has a much higher chance of success. Compared to aimlessly wandering around the dungeon, this is not only safer but far more efficient as well. I'm sure there may come a time where I have to leave my home, but I first want to get my level up a bit until I have a much bigger margin of error. I may have played an absurdly specialized character in that MMO, but in other RPGs, I usually prefer to do a bunch of early grinding to get my levels up. That way, I can just steamroll every boss in my way while I whistle a jaunty tune. Now that it's my own, precious life, I'd much rather play it safe until I think I'm strong enough to beat everything easily.

So, as part of my plan to safely get my level up, I'm trying to raise the level of my spider silk skill. My silk is my lifeline, right? If I hadn't made my home, I'd still be lost wandering around the dungeon. The thought sends shivers down my spine. I wouldn't have been able to survive like that, would I? I wouldn't have any safe place to rest, nor would I be able to catch any prey. I owe this pleasant lifestyle entirely to my wonderful silk.

Thus, I think leveling up my silk is my best course of action. I don't know how it might change as I gain more levels, but I can't think of any downsides. Just spinning more thread didn't seem to raise my skill at all, so I've been trying various experiments to see what its properties are. I've tried to see if I have any control over its various properties, like its thickness, adhesiveness, strength, and elasticity.

Controlling the thickness was extremely simple: if I think about spinning thin thread, thin thread comes out. I can't make it so fine you can't see it, but I can make it about the thickness of a human hair. In the dim light of the dungeon, such a thin thread should be almost impossible to see. I did a little test on its strength, and as expected it gets a lot less resilient as it gets thinner. Ah, well, it can't be helped. It's only natural that a thin thread would be more fragile than a thick one. Hopefully, when my skill level goes up, the threads will get stronger.

Conversely, making the thread thicker makes it way stronger. The thickest thread I can produce is nearly two centimeters in diameter. It's almost like a rope, isn't it? Well, two centimeters is about all I can produce under normal circumstances, but if I braid a bunch of it together I can get a much thicker cord. That takes time, though.

My adhesion experiments went... poorly. It's true that there are both sticky and non-sticky kinds of spider thread, but the real reason why spiders don't get stuck in it is because they know what they're doing. I can move around my webs just fine on instinct, but when I tried to figure things out manually, I somehow managed to tie my entire body up. Ahhhhh, yeah. It's only natural that things would get tangled up when trying to learn how to use different kinds of thread, but it's my own stupidity that got me tied up.

Ahh, I was too impatient. I hadn't yet noticed that I could reduce the stickiness of my threads after I spun them, and I almost died thanks to getting caught in my own trap. That

would have been way, way, way too dumb of a way to go out. Thanks to a stroke of divine inspiration, I realized that, as long as the thread's still attached to my butt, I can change its properties. After I disentangled myself, I tested to see if I could change the properties of a thread after I'd cut it, but it doesn't look like that's the case.

After I pulled myself together, I experimented with the silk's strength. While I did confirm that thin threads are weak and thick threads are strong, I have no idea what the maximum strength of these threads actually are. How could this be, you ask? When I crank the strength up to the max, I'm completely and utterly incapable of breaking it with my own strength. Even scarier, I can't slice or bite through it. Anything that gets caught up in this thread will probably be stuck there forever. Ah, well, there might be monsters that are strong enough to tear through it, so I shouldn't be too overconfident.

Last but not least, the results of my elasticity test: this stretchy, bouncy thread that I've got wrapped around my forelegs. Yeah. This rubbery silk is going to be super useful. If I could find suitable rocks to attach to it, I could make a simple slingshot, and I'm sure I'll come up with many other uses for it.

I'm quite satisfied with my experimental results. However, even after all that, my skill level didn't go up at all. Plus, I found out about a huge issue with my silk-spinning that I can't ignore: making these threads consumes my energy like mad. As a result, even though it's been barely any time since I killed that frog, I'm already exceedingly hungry. It's not like my fuel efficiency is terrible, but if I'm going to be spinning such large quantities of thread in the future, I'm definitely going to need to eat a bigger lunch first.

Chapter 12: A tearful reunion (lol)

Aaaaahh, I'm hungryyyyy, but nothing's gotten caught in my web so I can't eat! I've got no other way to fix this, so I'm just going to lie down and try to conserve my energy. Hey! This is definitely not just me being lazy again.

I thought I was going to be able to sleep as much as I wanted, but I'm rather rudely woken up when one of the threads I had attached to my webs started to vibrate. Did I catch something?! My fleeting joy turns to impatience in an instant. Since I'm connected to my webs, I can tell what's happening to them just by feeling their vibrations, but this is a kind of vibration I've never felt before.

Something is touching my web, that's for certain, but it's definitely not caught in it. It's almost... like... something's walking on it?

Impossible. Sure, I was prepared for the possibility that there might be some strong creatures that could break right through my webs, but I hadn't even thought to imagine that something could just casually walk around on them like it was nothing!

I freeze up under these unexpected circumstances, and fail to react in time. Something has already slipped through my webs and is encroaching upon my territory. This is bad. I already decided that I was going to run away if something broke through my webs, but now I find myself face to face with this guy. I was too careless. I wasn't 100% awake yet and got thrown way off-kilter by this unexpected thing happening. For the first time since I built my home, I feel danger.

Small Lesser Taratekt

The thing before me is another spider monster, just like me. It looks like, since we're the same species, it can move through my webs easily.

Hello, Brother. Well, rather, you're probably my sibling, but I don't really know if you're my brother or sister or whatever. This is the tearful reunion of two siblings separated at birth! Except a little more life-threatening.

Wait, wait, wait, wait, slow down. I just met this guy, there's no guarantee that he's actually my enemy! Sure, the other spiders may have been eating each other as soon as we were all born, but maybe now our familial bond will kick in.

Rustle, rustle. Hissss!

Ah, yeah, this guy's an enemy. He's just posturing though, not attacking yet. It seems like he's looking back and forth, taking in the layout of the place.

What should I do? I don't think running away will work. We're the same species, after all, and probably thus have the same sort of physical abilities. I've stayed alive thus far thanks to my speed at running away, but if this guy is as fast as I am then there's no way that's going to work. Even if I do manage to run away, I won't even be safe then! There are countless monsters lurking around out there, outside of the safety of my home. I'm already super hungry, so if I exhausted myself by running away at top speed I would be in serious danger outside. Even if I managed to get away safely, and even if I still had barely enough energy to build a new home, I'd still have to find a good place to put it, and wandering around exhaustedly is straight-up suicidal. Running away is a terrible idea.

Well then! It looks like my only option is to beat this guy. How should I do that? Can I even win? It feels like I'm at a bit of a disadvantage here. We're the same species, so our physical ability should be roughly the same... that is, if our levels are the same.

This guy was born at about the same time I was, so I'm guessing that there can't be that much of a difference between us. We're probably no more than one level apart, tops. This guy, though, has probably been wandering around outside while I've been staying in my home, so he's probably got at least one level on me.

Worst-case scenario, this guy might not actually be my sibling, and is instead a grizzled veteran born long ago. If that's the case, his level is absolutely going to be way higher than mine. If he's been alive long enough to reach the point where he can walk around unhindered, then I have zero chance at all.

Whatever the case, this is going to be a life-or-death battle. I shouldn't worry much about this guy's level at this point, all I can do is try my best. If that's not good enough, well, it's been fun, but that's the end of my short little spider life. Dying would suck, but I know first-hand that reincarnation exists, so I've got hope that there's another world after this one.

All right, I've prepared myself. Time to focus on this battle. Clear my thoughts, focus only on my enemy. My foe seems to have finished his preparations as well. He shifts his weight backwards a little bit, as if preparing to leap.

Exactly as I predicted, he jumps high into the air. As he plunges down at me, holding the claws on his forelegs high, I give him a pitying look. I step back quickly, firing threads at my mid-air opponent. This guy has made a serious mistake. Not only is he flying through the air, unable to dodge, but he chose to attack with his claws instead of his much more powerful venomous fangs. Don't get me wrong, our claw attacks aren't that bad. Their main use, though, should really be to restrain a foe, and not a primary weapon. As spiders, our chief weapons are our venom and our silk. Against a scrub like this who doesn't even understand that, there's no way I can lose.

I snare my brother easily with my threads as he soars over me. Entangled, he crashes to the ground. I waste no time in running up to him.

Chomp!

I bite him again and again with my envenomed fangs. It seems like he's got Poison Resistance like I do, but it doesn't really matter. I've got him all tied up, so my victory is assured. I've got all the time in the world to pump him so full of toxin that it exceeds his resistance.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Fang (LV 2)], has been raised to level 3.”

Thanks to all of the venom I've injected into this guy, my skill leveled up. At about the same time, my brother's life finally faded away. Brother, I will never forget you! You were the first fool to break into my home.

Chapter 13: I've earned an extremely disgraceful title

Somehow, I managed to get through my brother's unexpected invasion. Oh my god. I am so glad that he was such an idiot. A serious fight would have been seriously dangerous.

I'm starting to get a feel for my own strengths. If this were actually a game, I could pull up my stats, but instead I'm fumbling around, trying to figure things out objectively. I've already determined that my best weapons are my silk and my venomous fangs: I tangle up my foe in my silk, and then put an end to them with my fangs. Unfortunately, my invincible secret combo technique might not actually work on some foes. I'm pretty screwed if that's the case.

This applies not just to me, but to every other spider monster: silk and poison are our most important weapons. That idiot I just fought didn't understand it at all. In a battle between spiders, whoever immobilizes their opponent wins, so the core of my strategy was to stick a thread to them and get them all tangled up. The result is this train wreck. Why the hell did you throw yourself at me without any sort of plan? You're stupid! You're an idiot! You're going to get yourself killed! Heh, well, that already happened.

I'm actually kind of impressed that a guy this stupid survived for so long. I've been thinking that it's far too dangerous for me to venture too far out from my home, so how the hell did this guy manage to survive for so long with all those monsters out there? Ah, well, thinking about it too hard won't get me anywhere, because this guy is already dead, heh heh.

Hmm, what fate shall befall this jerk, whose corpse litters my territory? You should know this already. I'm hungry. The thought of eating a spider might be kind of gross, but I already put that kind of thinking aside when I had to eat that first frog. Hmm? He's my brother? So what? It's already been well established that my species is cannibalistic.

That said, let's dig in.

Phew, I'm full. This might sound weird, but that was definitely a bit tastier than the frogs. Hmm, is it really that after all? The frog's meat was both poisonous and acidic, was that why it was so bitter? Well, spider meat is still poisonous, so it was still pretty gross, but at the least it wasn't quite as bad as a frog.

As I came to this conclusion, the mechanical voice of the "Voice of Heaven" resounded in my head.

"You have earned the title [Filth Eater¹], and have been awarded the skills [Poison Resistance (LV 1)] and [Decay Resistance (LV 1)]. Your new skill, [Poison Resistance (LV 1)], has been integrated with your existing skill, [Poison Resistance (LV 3)]."

"You have earned the title [Kin Eater], and have been awarded the skills [Taboo (LV 1)] and [Corruption Magic² (LV 1)]."

What?! What the hell is this? I'm usually surprised whenever I hear the "Voice of Heaven", but this time I'm not just surprised, I'm dumbfounded. Ah, let's take some time and calm myself down. Lately, I've taken to spinning thread into little white balls to soothe my nerves. Ahh, that's better.

Alright, hm, she said "title". Those are like bonuses you get when you meet some special requirements and earn an achievement, right? That's probably it, but, uh, these are pretty gross. Disgraceful, even. "Filth Eater"? That's insulting! "Kin Eater"? That's straight-up awful! Can other people see these? Maybe someone with high Appraisal skill can. Wow. Man, if anyone saw these I'd be done in an instant. Well, I'm a monster, so I'd probably be attacked long before anyone bothered looking at my titles.

Putting aside how awful these titles are, aren't they kind of unbelievable? In a single moment I got four skills! Four! I already had poison resistance, but the "Voice of Heaven" made it sound like the new skill got rolled into my previous skill's proficiency rating. Ahhh,

I really wish I had an easy way to check, not knowing for sure is super inconvenient! I need to get Appraisal's level up.

I'm way more interested in the other three skills. Decay Resistance is pretty understandable, I think. I'd probably raise its level by eating decaying or rotting things, although I can't ever see myself wanting to. The other two skills are the problematic ones.

"Taboo"? That's certainly the name of the skill, but I have literally zero clue what it does. I can't even make a wild guess! Hello? GMs? Can I get an explanation, please? If I don't know what this does, I can't use it!

Corruption Magic is the same problem. I have no idea how to use this! What should I do, chant some sort of dark incantation? I'm a spider! I can't speak! All I can do is make this raspy sort of noise by grinding my teeth together. Man, even if I could talk I have no idea what the incantation even is, so it's not like that would fix any of my problems.

Just to test it out, I clear my mind and concentrate on the words "Corruption Magic".yep, nothing's happening. I can't use this!

Ugh! I thought that getting all of these skills and titles was going to be great, but the only useful thing I got out of it was Decay Resistance! Well, I guess my Poison Resistance may have gotten a proficiency boost, even if it didn't go up in level. ...now that I think about it, those were both from Filth Eater, weren't they? Kin Eater, what good are you?!

Ah, I just realized, if you earn Kin Eater by eating a family member, all of my siblings who survived that battle back when we were born probably have that title too. Hmm, but if that's the case then that idiot I just killed should have had that title too. I guess the Kin Eater title doesn't really have much effect on combat ability, then, so it wouldn't matter that I can't figure out how to use it. Ahh, I see! This must be because it was so easy to acquire. If it's easy to get, its effect will be low.

Still, finding about this title system is pretty huge! Earning a bunch of titles might be a very efficient way to pick up a bunch of skills. I don't really know what new titles I can acquire, or how I might go about earning them, but let's try a bunch of different things to check!

Translator's Notes for this chapter:

1. More literally, “Eater of Bad Things” (惡食).
2. 外道魔法 is more directly translated as “heretical magic” or “demonic magic”, but *Corruption Magic* more accurately captures the tone.

Chapter 14: Weaving a better home

Some time has passed since my brother's attack.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Spider Silk (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”

Thanks to how much I've been playing... ahem, practicing with my threads, the skill has leveled up a few times. Ahhh, but it's been really slow-going, though. Thanks to all that, my home is now completely covered in pure white silk.

My home is completely different from how it was when I first made it. Firstly, there are far more webs now than there were before. When I first built it, I only built webs immediately around this T-junction I'm in now, and they were mostly just composed of nets placed high and low. Now, I've got webs stretching all the way out along each passage until the next intersection, and I've changed up the composition a bunch. I figured that there must be other creatures out there able to slip past my webs as easily as my dear, departed brother did, I might as well put a ton of them in their way so that they'll be slowed down a bit. Just that alone makes my home a much safer place.

Doing all that wasn't enough to raise my skill level, so next I freshened up the walls a bit. I've covered them in enough silk to paint them absolutely white. Don't think this is just ordinary wallpaper, though! They're attached to the rest of my webs, so if anything gets caught in a web the wallpaper will come free and wrap up my prey. After many, many failed experiments, I have finally perfected these stupendous traps!

Shortly after I started putting up my wallpaper, my skill level went up by one. After I finished covering the walls, it was time for the finishing touch: carefully stringing invisibly fine threads around the entirety of my home. These threads weren't the slightest bit sticky, but they snap at the slightest touch. They're so weak that they'll snap on their own after a while, just from slight changes in the air currents, and will then eventually stick harmlessly to the wallpaper. I wasn't able to make a thread this fine before, but it looks like I gained even more control after my Spider Silk skill leveled up to five.

The main purpose of these threads is to alert me to any incoming enemies. I've attached myself to them, so I'll feel the vibration if anything even brushes against them. These enemy-detecting threads are my solution to the extremely inconvenient problem of not being able to see behind me, and I've strung them up everywhere so that I don't have to worry in the slightest about surprise attacks from the rear. Eventually, I'd like to figure out how to operate these remotely so that I can start feeling out areas outside my home.

Of course, after I finished all of this, I had completely run out of things to do. I turned to spinning a bunch of silk with no particular goal in mind, which thankfully pushed my skill proficiency over the edge to level six. This now lets me produce silk of unbelievably high quality, which I've been using my free time to turn into little balls of silk for later use. If I sold these to humans, I could make a ton of money, you know? Haha, well, I have no idea what their textile industry is even like.

Incidentally, spinning all of this silk did, of course, make me hungry, so I ate all of the pitiful little creatures that wandered helplessly into my webs. They were all, unfortunately, poisonous, which made finishing them off a huge pain thanks to their built-in resistance to my venomous fangs. Once they were caught in my web, though, my victory was all but assured. I'm pretty sure, though, that I wouldn't be able to win against these guys at all if I didn't have my webs. I have to bite things over and over to have any effect, and an unrestrained foe would have plenty of time to counterattack while I was busy.

Thanks to all of that poison, though, my Poison Resistance skill leveled up to five, and my Poison Fang leveled up to four. I don't know if it's thanks to Poison Resistance, but I'm starting to get used to the bitter taste of this meat.

Let's see, so far I've caught three "Elro Randanels", one "Elro Pekatot", one "Elro Basilisk", and one, uh, "Finjegoat". All of them got caught in my web, and I dispatched them all with my poison fangs. The three Randanels showed up at the same time, which caught me a little off guard, but thanks to my amazing web-weaving skills I caught and killed them all quite easily. The Pekatot looked kind of like a penguin and a pelican had a baby, and that baby had weird monkey-like arms. The Finjegoat looked kind of like a bee, but it was super

huge, nearly three meters long! It nearly filled up the entire hallway. Of course, thanks to that, it got tangled up in even more of my webs.

The most dangerous of them all was the Basilisk. It was a huge, lizard-like monster that, true to its name, had a petrification attack. Just like in the fairy tale, it hit me with its petrifying gaze and turned one of my front legs to stone. Luckily, the rate at which the petrification spread was very low, so I was able to kill it off before it became too much of a problem, but that was still the most formidable prey I've caught so far. Until I leveled up and shed my skin, I had to live with a petrified leg. Sure, picking up the Petrification Resistance skill may have made this a net plus, but this was even more dangerous than the frog was!

Ah, I may have perhaps glossed over it just now, but I did, in fact, level up. I did so three times, in fact! I am now level five. The skills that I know I have are Poison Fang at level four, Spider Silk at level six, Appraisal at level two, Taboo at level one, Corruption Magic at level one, Poison Resistance at level five, Acid Resistance at level two, Decay Resistance at level one, and Petrification Resistance at level one. Even though I went up three levels, my skills have barely gone up! Appraisal hasn't even budged from level two. It looks like I might have overestimated how many bonus proficiency points I got on level up.

I missed this when I first leveled up, but it looks like I gain skill points whenever I gain a level, although it doesn't look like I get very many. I got really excited when the "Voice of Heaven" said I got skill points, but I was left seriously disappointed when I tried to actually spend them. I racked my brain, trying every convenient RPG skill I could think of like "Item Box" or "Automatic Regeneration", but I couldn't pick up any of them. I couldn't even find out if they truly existed! Every time I asked, the only response I got back from the "Voice of Heaven" was **"Insufficient skill points."**

Looks like plan "buy every skill and become undefeatable" is a no-go: picking up skills might be a little harder than I thought.

Chapter 15. Forced from Paradise

Today is another blissfully lazy day. Ahhh, my home is so luxurious! Food just wanders right into my lap and my webs keep the riffraff out, so I can sleep peacefully even in this dangerous dungeon. I've covered the hard stone floor with a fluffy bed of threads, so sleeping is super comfortable. My daily routine basically just consists of lazing around and spinning thread. Ahh, bliss.

Thinking about it, my previous life was quite hectic! I didn't think much about it at the time, but, seriously, only four hours of sleep? I woke up super early to go to school, and stayed up playing video games until I could barely stay up at all. That was my life, huh... I really loved playing games, but now that I look back on it, I wonder if maybe I was doing it because I felt like I had to.

I was one of the top players in that MMO, even though I was only a free player! I might have felt like I needed to live up to my reputation, and that might have pushed me past my capacity. Living up to other people's expectations, though? What a joke! That's just raw self-conceit. I don't really give a shit about other people. I mean, well, that's what I thought, but maybe even I had some faint traces of human emotion, even if I'm only finding out about it in hindsight.

But, now, in my new life, I have nothing meaningful to do at all! I feel like I've finally thrown off my shackles. When I started out, I was a little worried that I'd go crazy from all the free time, but it looks like I was just overthinking things. Sure, I might not have MMOs to occupy my free time, but it's not like I'm bored out of my skull.

Somehow, it looks like my standards of happiness are a little bit lower compared to other people's. Seriously, just being alive is great! I don't have to worry about food or shelter, which is extremely great! I would be perfectly content living my entire life like this. I don't really know how long spiders live, though.

Unfortunately, as much as I would hope otherwise, it's basically guaranteed that something is going to force me out of my home. It could be some unexpected event, a change in the

environment, or something awful breaking through my nest. I don't know just what it will be, but I know it's got to be coming. It's inevitable. I should make sure I'm ready.

Yeah, okay! I said it! I said I would get myself ready! But this is way! Too! Soon!

Before my panicked eyes, one of the entrances to my home is catching fire. I had been gradually drifting off to sleep, but suddenly I saw flames start to rise. The home I had put so much effort into building was slowly being consumed by a sea of flame. Is my much-vaunted invincible thread weak to fire?!

What started the fire, though? That's easy: a human. Standing before the flames is a human man. A man, holding a torch. A torch that almost certainly was used to set my web ablaze.

This is bad. I can't really see it through the flames, but behind that man I can make out the forms of even more people. This fire can't have been an accident. They were totally on a lookout for spiderwebs. If that's the case, then they must be on the lookout for the spider monster inside it. Me.

If I stay here, I've got only two options: be swallowed by the flames or be cornered by the humans. Either way, I wind up dead. Luckily, the flames haven't reached where I am yet, so I can leave through one of the other entrances. I don't think the humans would be able to catch up to me if I did that.

I look around my home one last time. I've spent most of my life here, since I was reincarnated. I poured my sweat and tears into building it. I discovered so many things here, both good and bad. It had kept me safe for so long! I've spent so much time in it that I might even love it even more than I did my room in my previous life.

I take off, running away from the fire, skillfully slipping through my complicated network of spiderwebs. This is it, the last web. Once I pass this, there's no turning back. Once I pass this, there's nowhere safe to run to anymore.

Even so, without hesitating, I dive under my final web. I suppress the urge to turn around and look. For now, I must get as far away from here as I can.

And thus, I was driven from my home.

This might be a bit of a digression, but the adventurers that chased me away didn't burn down my entire nest. The center was left largely unscathed, and in it they found the stockpile of fine silk balls I had been spinning. The adventurers retrieved it from the dungeon, and the clothes made from my silk fetched an absurdly high price. The king of a fairly major country even purchased some of it, which made the news.

I only found out about this much later, of course.

Chapter 16. Leaving the nest!

Trudge, trudge.

My footsteps are heavy. I ran as fast as I could until my legs gave out, but I'm still in serious shock. My precious home is gone! I thought nothing could shake me anymore, since not even becoming a spider and having to eat terrible food could disturb my iron heart, but now I feel like my soul's been ripped out.

Aahhhh, I knew the day was going to come when I would have to leave my home, and I was planning on preparing myself for it, but now that it's actually happened the shock is way worse than I had thought. I thought that I was going to have a little more time, so this is a really serious blow. I had wanted to stay put at least until I hit level 10!

Mmmngh. Mmmmmnnnghhh. MmmmmmmMMMMMNnnnn... GAH!

Right!! The time for hesitation is over, the time for action is now. Let's shift gears.

First things first: figure out my next step. I have three options:

1. Find another place in the dungeon to build a new web
2. Wander around the dungeon like I'm doing now
3. Look for the exit

That's all I can come up with on such short notice. Option 1 is probably the best in terms of safety, but I think I'm going to rule it out.

My home was amazing, almost like a dream. All of my basic necessities were completely taken care of, and I barely had to work for it. It was a perfect paradise, wasn't it? But maybe keeping myself sitting idly in there was making me weak, both physically and emotionally.

Since my home made hunting so easy, I was slowly turning into a good-for-nothing idiot who didn't know how to deal with unexpected situations. This time, though, I'm going to be mindful of that. As I am now, if anything comes crashing through my next web, I'm just going to have to run away again.

That absolutely won't do. If all I can do is run, then I'm going to have to deal with moments of frustration and sadness like this forever. When those people burned down my home, they lit a smoldering feeling in my heart. I am not going to be the kind of person that runs away from things. Yeah, that's unforgivable.

All I could think about while my home was burning around me was how there was nothing I could do but flee. Yeah, that's right, I had always been thinking that I would run away if something dangerous came. But now, now that I've run away? I'm so full of regret and shame that I want to tear myself apart. Could I do something like this again? Absolutely not, I wouldn't be able to bear it.

What's really making my blood boil is that my home wasn't just some convenient place for me to live. It was near and dear to my heart. It might sound a little cliche, but I really felt like I belonged there.

Back on Earth, I really didn't feel like I belonged anywhere. My home was falling apart, and I never really fit in at school. Games were great, but ultimately they were just fiction. I didn't really have anywhere to belong, so I adopted a rebellious, "fuck you, who needs to belong anyway" sort of attitude.

My home was something that I made, for my own sake, without worrying about what anyone else might think. It was a place just for me.

It was taken from me, and it felt like they were plundering my very existence. If I were to surrender here, I'd never be able to be proud of myself again. Why the hell was I thinking that just being able to live was bliss? That's the philosophy of a naive idiot who grew up in a peaceful Japan. Living without pride isn't living at all! I'm going to carve this deep into my soul.

My home was stolen from me. My pride has been wounded. I will become stronger, and I will redeem myself. Secluding myself in a new home and sticking to the safe hunting methods is no longer good enough. I need to get some real combat experience.

The two options I have left are either wandering around the dungeon or searching for the exit. It's not like it's much of a choice though, those two things aren't very different. After all, I have no idea where the exit actually is, so I'd be wandering around the dungeon anyway.

First off, I know way too little about this dungeon. I may have been born and raised in here, but I don't even know its name. I don't know how big it is, don't know the difficulty level, and don't even have a vague idea of its layout. There are way too many things I don't know.

Hm? Weren't there other things I was complaining I didn't know about...? Ah! Right, right, back when I picked up Appraisal! I couldn't raise Appraisal's level any further while I was still in my home, but now that I'm outside I might be able to! If I can get its level up, it might start being a little more useful, so I'm going to start appraising everything I come across. Let's begin!

Labyrinth Wall

Labyrinth Wall

Labyrinth Ceiling

Ah, as useless as ever. Hmm, well, if I keep this up and appraise everything I come across, I should be accumulating proficiency points. Ugh, having all of this information pouring into my brain is a pretty bad feeling, though. I'm just going to have to suffer until I get used to it, huh...

Back when I appraised that huge crowd of monsters, did I get hit by this same kind of bad feeling? Hmm, I don't think so... Maybe the raw shock of seeing so many monsters overwhelmed the weird feelings that Appraisal caused. Well, whatever. For now, I'll be wandering around the dungeon and appraising everything I can see.

Chapter 17: Underhanded tactics in a face-to-face battle

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 2)], has been raised to level 3.”

Aha, that leveled up pretty quickly! Not very much time has passed since I started spamming Appraisal everywhere. This got way easier once I stopped being such a shut-in... Man, I've got some serious mixed feelings about this.

Well, regardless, it leveled! This is the best thing I could have hoped for. Now then, now then, what shall level three reveal? I immediately try to appraise myself.

Small Lesser Taratekt — LV 5 — (no name)

It's showing my level! Yaaaay... ...hahhh. Well, a plus is a plus, but... at what point is this skill going to actually be useful?

Mmm. Really, I have no idea how strong my species is supposed to be. Compared to everything else in this dungeon, how strong is a Small Lesser Taratekt?

As soon as I finished that thought, new information popped into my brain.

Small Lesser Taratekt: A Taratekt hatchling of an inferior breed.

What... was that? Did... did I just appraise the name of my species, which I got from Appraisal? Did I just double-appraise?! Oooh. Did I just discover a really important little trick to this skill? Let's test it, let's test it! I activate Appraisal once again.

Taratekt: A species of spider-like monster.

It worked! This is amazing! If Appraisal spits out some new word that I don't know yet, I can appraise it! Ahaa!! Sure, the explanation is pretty short, and it's definitely not giving me all of the information, but if I keep leveling this up, it's going to be crazy good, isn't it?!

Just appraising one thing will let me pull up fact after fact! Ha-HA! Mister Appraisal, I'm sorry for saying you were useless! I will put my full efforts into leveling you up!

Now then, once my Appraisal-driven high wore off, I eventually became aware of two fairly important problems. Specifically: I'm hungry! And tired! That's basically it. It makes sense though; I fled my home at top speed and have been wandering the dungeon ever since, so it's only natural that I could use a snack and some sleep.

It's not like I can't deal with it for a little while longer, but eventually I will need to eat something and find someplace to sleep. Both of these tasks share the same stumbling block though: other monsters. If I want to eat, I need to find a monster, kill it, and eat it. Conversely, if I want to sleep, I need to find a place where monsters can't find me. This is a real catch-22. Mmm.

Ah! There might be a solution to both of these problems: when it's time for me to go to sleep, I'll put together a much simpler home and sleep in that. That will kill two birds with one stone: I'll be able to sleep in relative safety, and if a monster blunders in and gets stuck, I'll get breakfast for free.

It's just that... a little while ago, I said that I wanted to do as much hunting for my food as I could manage. Building a simple home to sleep in is basically mandatory, but while I'm awake I really should try to find a battle. Ultimately, my temporary home shouldn't be for the purposes of hunting. It should pretty much just be a safe place to get some sleep. Ah, well, if something gets caught in my web, I'm not going to refuse to eat it, haha.

Until then, let's keep wandering around the dungeon in search of a monster!

Found one!

Elro Frog — LV 3

It seems that I'm destined to find nothing but frogs: at the end of the hallway I've been sneaking through, I can see yet another one of the things. It's got its back turned to me, at the moment, and it doesn't look like it's noticed me yet. Could I maybe kill it with a sneak attack?

Of course, as soon as I think that, it spots me. Tch.

Hissssss!

I start off with intimidation.

Ptoo!

Wha-!? Hey, you, don't just suddenly shoot your acid at me! I was barely able to dodge that!

Ptoo! Ptoo! Ptoo!

Don't keep shooting!! Ahh, aaah, ooof! I can't dodge all of these! Ow! Oww! I've got some resistance now, so this doesn't hurt nearly as much as it did the first time, but this! Still! Hurtsss! You jerk, how was I supposed to know you were this aggressive when you weren't stuck in a web?!

Ptoo! Ptoo! Ptoo!

Wait, wait! Gaaah! Another one got through to me! This is bad! The way things are going, this is going to be extremely one-sided! I've got only one option: suicide rush!!

Ptoo! Ptoo! Ptoo!

Hah, as if you can hit me again with the same attack! I've seen through your moves: your limit is three shots at a time! Don't take me too lightly, frog! I possess the analytic eye of a true gamer, and was once compared to the great Kartikeya! I dodge the poison spit as I rush in, then swing my claws down at the frog!

Grr, as I expected, it manages to dodge, but as it jumps out of the way it lashes out at me with its tongue!

Splat!

OWW! The tongue strikes me with crushing force. And, of course! It's covered in acid too! Not only was this a heavy blow, I'm feeling a sizzling pain! Ohhhh, this is a serious wound. If I had a health bar, it would be flashing bright red right now. If I take one more hit like that, I'm done for.

Heh, it's not like that's going to happen, though.

I've already won.

After all, before the frog jumped away, I'd laced the surroundings with my webs.

It's quite simple, really. As I was dodging the acid spit attacks, I was trailing threads out onto the ground behind me. Usually, if I'm not careful, I wind up unconsciously dropping thread onto the ground behind me as I walk. This time, though, I made use of it. I made the silk that I was spewing out very sticky, and forced the frog to jump onto it. My claw attack was specifically aimed to force it to dodge towards my trap. I didn't expect it to counter-attack in midair, though.

The frog lands and immediately gets stuck. Mercilessly, I wrap it up tightly with more and more thread, until there was only one thing left to do.

Chomp!

I have just won (albeit by a very slim margin) my first actual fight.

Chapter 18: Recovering your HP at inns only happens in games

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Acid Resistance (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

My skill leveled. With this, it'll be a little bit easier to take down the next frog I come across. To be quite honest, if I didn't already have resistance, I think I would have gone over my maximum HP.

That was close! My body is practically in tatters. I got hit by that frog's spit twice and his tongue once, and just like that I'm on the brink of death. That tongue attack, though. Way too dangerous. A good chunk of my abdomen was straight-up caved in by the impact, and the sheer force of it rendered a few of my legs useless.

It's not like I walked into this unprepared or anything. I already knew that a straight-up fight against another monster was going to be way less likely to work than luring them into my webs. Even still, somewhere, in a hopelessly naive corner of my heart, I had thought that I'd be able to win it anyway. I'm way too exhausted, now.

Well, I don't think I'm going to be able to get very far with my body in this state. I should build a very basic home here, and focus on letting my wounds heal.

I leave the slain frog where it is, and start to weave my webs. Ow. Just moving around causes pain to stab through my body.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Pain Resistance (LV 1)].”

Oh? A new skill? Ahh, it feels like the pain is lessening just a little bit. It's still extremely painful, though. This is a pretty useful skill, though, you know? If I somehow manage to keep on living, even in this state, I'll keep getting proficiency. Small favors, huh.

Hoooof. At any rate, my basic home's done. Now I can finally rest. If I were any other kind of monster, I'd be wiped out if something happened to come along.

Ahhh, well, I've still got my hard-won prey here to eat. Let's dig in.

I just barely scraped through my first real fight. Eh? What about that fight with my brother? I can't really call that a fight, you know. Doesn't count. Getting some real combat experience has made one thing pretty freaking obvious, though.

I'm WEEEEAK!

Yeah. It's not just that I as an individual am weak, but I think the entire species of Small Lesser Taratekts are weak. Well, we are an inferior breed, after all. Our attacks are weak, and our defenses fragile. Our one good quality seems to be our speed, but even that isn't good enough for me to be able to dodge all of that frog's saliva attacks. Looks like my base stats aren't even close to a low-level frog's.

I hadn't really had any problems killing enemies until now, thanks to my spiderweb traps. This straight-up fight, though, was a mess. I'm really starting to understand just how much I was using my home as a crutch.

Even so, one thing is very clear. Frontal assaults are impossible. If I have to fight head-on, everything hinges on my ability to snare my foe with my silk. My only other real option is trying to get in close and bite them with my poison fangs, but my low stats make that impossible. I'd be cut down before I could get in a single attack.

With my speed, I can dance around my foe and strike when they slip up. I could also lay traps as I dodge and bait them into it, like I did just now. These will be the foundation of my strategy. Ooh, if I have enough forewarning, I could set traps in advance and lure them in.

Now that I think about it, I'm not at all suited to go against these frogs. With all of those ranged attacks, they're like a machine gun emplacement. There's no real need for them to

move, so they're not going to jump into a trap of their own accord. Ugh, it really sucks not having a long-ranged attack. I could theoretically throw my threads at them, but the range is short and, worse, it might make them more mindful of my threads. I'll just keep that one in reserve. I should really come up with a good countermeasure for long-ranged attacks before I have to face them again.

Haaagh. I've got way too many problems. I've come face to face with my weaknesses... my enormous pile of weaknesses. Well, I can't really give up here, now, can I. If I just wanted to live, I could build a new home and hide there. But that won't do at all. I've decided that I will live proudly! I'm not going to take the easy way out like that.

But, for now, I should take it easy. How long will it take for these injuries to heal? ...Rather, are they even going to heal on their own? Maaaan, I wish I actually was a game character. Then I could heal all of my injuries with one night's rest.

Regardless, time to sleep. Today was exhausting, and I need to get plenty of rest if I want to have any chance of getting better. So, with that, good night.

Zzzzz. Hmm? Aaahhhhhh, I slept well! ...I say that, but it really feels less like I slept and more like I just passed out. Ergh, everything's still sore. I guess injuries this severe aren't going to heal themselves overnight.

Yaaaaaw— OWOWOWOW! I tried to stretch as I usually do, but moving my legs sent spears of pain running through them. Uuugh, my middle two right legs have it the worst. If I'm not careful, are they going to break off? Man, I'm really starting to get worried about my prospects for recovery.

Tap, tap.

Hm? My webs are vibrating... wait. Whoa! Even this basic web managed to catch something overnight! Man, the vibrations along my web usually wake me up as soon as

something gets caught, but it looks like I was out absolutely cold. Maybe it's because of how beat up I am.

Elro Basilisk — LV 4

Whoa, if it isn't the petrifying lizard. Looks like I've caught yet another dangerous creature. What should I do... That thing has a petrifying gaze, so even though I've got it immobilized, it can still turn me to stone if our eyes meet. With such awful injuries, wouldn't petrification be extra-awful? ...Well, it's not like I'm going to set my all-important prey free.

Blink.

Ah, shoot, it opened its eyes! Nnngh! The ends of my legs are turning to stone! Aaaagh, fine! If it's come to this, I have no choice!

Chomp!

Thanks to Petrification Resistance, the rate of petrification is slow, but losing my one good foreleg is extremely bad. If I can't stop it before that happens, walking is going to be next to impossible. Please, I beg of you, die! While my leg can still move!

Slump.

As if in response to my prayers, strength leaves the basilisk's body while my leg is only half-fossilized. Ummmmf, walking on this isn't going to be impossible, but damn, it's going to be tough.

“Experience requirements met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you have grown from level 5 to level 6.”

Oh? Ohhh?! What godly timing!!

“Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Poison Fang (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5 and

your skill [Petrification Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Okay, okay! Two skills leveled up, which is great. But that's not why I'm happy...!

The skin starts to peel off my body. I'm molting. Thanks to this miraculous level-up, I'm literally shedding my injuries away! Even the huge dent in my abdomen that I was worried about has been completely fixed! Ya-HAAA! Basilisk, thank you! Thank you! Now, time to eat!

Even if I can't just sleep at an inn to get my hit points back, leveling up is almost as good.

Chapter 19. If I don't get hit, there's no problem!

Ahh, it feels good to be back up to full. Oh man, I had completely forgotten that leveling up comes with a full heal attached.

Well, I don't think I'll be able to rely on levelups all the time. I just leveled, so it's probably going to be a while before I do so again. If I let myself get as injured as I just did every time I fight, it's pretty obvious that my wounds are just going to keep piling up. Hmm, if I hide away in a simple home like this every time I get wounded, maybe...

Yeah, no, that's not happening. That would just be reverting back to old habits.

...I say that, but I really need to figure out how I'm solving this problem. I just leveled up, but it's not like I suddenly got way stronger. I'm fully aware of my own weaknesses as a fighter, so I really think that I can find a way to win if I just put my mind to it. Suicidally diving straight into combat without a plan would be like diving straight into the Sanzu River¹. ...Hm, now that I think about it, I died, and was reincarnated, but I don't recall crossing that river...

Well, in the end, do I have any other options? Ideally, I'd like to never take get wounded ever, but I am, alas, not afforded that luxury. Not only that, but I can't guarantee that I'm even going to win my next battle!

That frog fight was one bad move away from being extremely awful. What would I have done if the frog hadn't jumped into my web? I really don't want to think about it. It's hard enough to just barely survive a life-or-death struggle like that, let alone trying to do so without taking any damage at all. That's a hurdle I don't think I'd be able to clear.

Hmm, well, wait. That might not be a good line of thinking. Isn't getting hit extremely dangerous? I don't think my paper-thin defenses are going to be able to stand up to anything in a real fight. Yeah, this is seriously bad.

Compared to all the other monsters I've encountered so far, these frogs don't seem to even be particularly dangerous.

Yeah, I'm well aware that they are extremely dangerous to me; I fought one just now! If you just look at them, though, they don't look dangerous at all. If you ignored all of the bright "hey I'm poisonous don't eat me" markings, these things wouldn't be even the slightest bit threatening. Heck, if it didn't have the poison going for it, there's a ton of things out there that could just straight-up crush it through raw, superior strength. Yet, with one single hit from that tongue, I was brought to the brink of death.

If I ran into anything stronger, would I be able to take any of their attacks without dying at all?

No way. If I got hit by anything that strong, I'd be lucky if an injury is all I got.

What should I do? I don't have a single countermeasure. My defenses are all but useless! I should absolutely be working under the assumption that I am going to die if I get hit at all. So, shouldn't I just dodge everything that comes at me? It's so simple! Ah! Ha! Ha! Ha! Just like one of my impossible games!

In my previous life, my dodging skills in video games were straight-up godly. I only got to that point, though, because of the many, many hours of practice I put in. Let me be perfectly clear, though: I learned through failure. I died a ton before I finally figured out what I was doing wrong. I would charge in and survive as long as I could, just so that I could memorize a little more of the enemy's attack patterns. Once I had eventually gotten it down, though, then I could pull off my dodge-focused gimmick character with my eyes closed. Conversely, though: if it's an enemy I hadn't seen before, I had to start back at square one.

You really could compare the way I am now to my MMO playstyle. Just like back then, I've effectively got almost all of my stat points dumped into speed, a few into damage, and the rest left at their starting values. With paper-thin defenses and no way to deal with a threat at range, it really isn't a very practical way to build a non-gimmick character. Now, of course, I have to put up with this ridiculously disadvantageous build in real life.

First off, there's tons of ways that reality doesn't quite match up with a game. Let's take moving, for instance. In a game, all I needed to do was move my fingers a little bit to push a button, but in reality I have to move my entire body! My field of view is also way more constrained in reality than what I could see on my monitor. Most importantly, though: unlike in a game, I'm constantly terrified that a fight might end in my painful death.

Hm? It doesn't seem like I've been terrified, you say? Don't be ridicul... oh, hm, have I really not...? Hmm? Let's, uh, let's forget about that last bit.

Yeah. In any event, this reality is very different than a game. I'm not going to be able to play the same kind of dodge gimmick character, since there's no way I'm going to be able to die over and over to make it work. Of course, I say there's no way I can make it work, but, really, I don't have any other ideas.

Ummf. Really, I have too few cards in my hand of skills. I've got Spider Silk, which is very versatile, but Poison Fang has basically just one way to use it. Appraisal... well, I continue to hold out hope that Appraisal will be useful once I get its level up! My Resistances are certainly useful, but that's mostly because my basic defenses are so weak. All that's left are the two skills I don't have any idea how to use: Corruption Magic and Taboo.

The "Magic" part of Corruption Magic brings to mind images of long-ranged spell attacks, but I have no idea how to use it. Aaaagh, I seriously need a tutorial! Seriously, if you're going to give me a skill, at least tell me how to use it! In a lot of fantasy settings, isn't just focusing on a spell enough to cast it? Man, it would be great if it were that easy. Ahhhhh... ha. Well, it's not like complaining is going to make an explanation appear.

I peek out from behind a crag.

Small Rock Turtle — LV 2

Yeah. It's a turtle with a rock on its back. It's certainly quite large, but I don't think it's any much larger than a Galapagos tortoise. Really, compared to the other things I've seen so far, this really doesn't make a strong impression. Oh, wait, didn't its name say "Small"? Is this a... baby?

Small Rock Turtle: The juvenile form of a Rock Turtle.

Ah, is that that the case? I see! This is a child, you say? I definitely do not want to meet its mother.

Well, then, shall we get started? It doesn't seem like my opponent's noticed me just yet... so! Let's get right in with a sneak attack!

I leap out from behind my crag and charge in at full speed. I leap onto the turtle's rocky shell, and stick it with my silk!

Nwhooa! It threw me off! My threads still managed to get attached quite firmly, though. The turtle's stuck in plac— aaaaAAAAAAH!

The turtle snapped my threads and is charging straight at me!

Wha?! Retreat! Retreat! I jump to the side right before it hits.

Crash!!

The turtle charges forward until it hits the wall with a spectacular impact. Whoooooah. If I had gotten hit by that, I'd have gotten pancaked, right? Really, this is the first time I've seen a foe that can tear through my webs. This is bad, right?!

The turtle spins around to face me. Another charge! I dodge it! *Crash!* Another! I dodge! *Crash!!* Another!! Agh! That's enough!!

As I dodge the latest charge, I leave a thread behind to catch the turtle's leg. It trips and falls, but the momentum from its charge sends it tumbling. It lands on its back! Like this,

you're going to have a hard time getting back up, aren't you, turtle? Heh, as if I would even let you try.

Chomp!

Sure, if I had gotten hit, I'd have died... but if I don't get hit, there's no problem!

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *The reference here is a Japanese Buddhist one, to the mythical River of Three Crossings (Sanzu-no-kawa). It's very similar to the River Styx: it is an extremely dangerous river that the dead must cross to enter the afterlife.*

Chapter 20. I'm a spider, I'm right behind ya~!

Beating that turtle was tough! Even after I managed to flip it over, I tried to bite it to death, but that jerk retreated into its shell! I almost got my fangs pinched off when it sucked its head in. Of course, with my pathetic strength, I had no way to yank it back out, so I had to kind of just let poison dribble from my fangs into the head hole. That certainly got its attention! It shot its head back out of its shell, thrashing wildly, and I sunk my fangs into its helpless neck.

Then, I got to see what turtle tastes like. It was the first time ever since I was reborn that I'd gotten to taste meat that wasn't poisonous! It was chewy, and didn't taste very good.

Umf. I didn't get hurt this time! I was able to dodge every single one of my opponent's attacks. Of course, that turtle just kept charging me over and over like an idiot, and it's not like it was very fast at all, so I had all the time in the world to get out of the way. It's not like I'm some grand master at evasion, I just faced an opponent that was perfect for me.

Hmmmm. Although, I kind of feel like I'm a definitely faster than I was before. I know that all of my stats go up when I level, but I really don't feel much of an effect on most of them. My speed, though, has definitely and notably increased. Compared to when I was fighting the frog, I'm way faster. Looks like us Taratekts are extremely specialized in speed! Nevertheless, fighting purely via evasion is impossible.

Yeah! My speed and my threads are my greatest weapons. With these two, there's one strategy that's exactly tailored to me: sneak attacks!

Hm? That's cowardly? Cowardice means jack shit in a life-or-death fight! Think of this like a preemptive strike. That's not cowardice at all! Well, a preemptive strike does tend to decide the course of a battle.

What? I'm not going to get any useful combat experience? This is most certainly combat! You upon your lofty throne could not possibly understand it!

Well, I say that I'm going to try sneak attacks, but there's only like a fifty-fifty chance I can actually pull it off, right? We're in a danger zone! The other monsters aren't just blithely wandering through, they're going to be on the lookout for danger. If I can actually pull off a sneak attack, I stand to gain a lot... probably. If it fails, though, then I'm going to have to make a lot of really snappy decisions based on how the situation unfolds.

The big problem is any other monsters that could rip off my threads like the turtle did. Seriously, the threads I had thought were impervious to all but flame can be torn off? My Spider Silk skill is level six. It's the highest skill I have! Tearing through my silk basically equals defeating me. I'm really glad that turtle was such a good match with the rest of my abilities. Other monsters, though. Just the thought of other silk-ripping monsters is terrible. Granted, I may have been over-relying on my threads a little bit. I'm going to keep this idea at the edge of my thoughts from now on.

After that, I wandered through the labyrinth for a bit, but didn't find any other monsters. I'm getting sleepy, so I'm calling it for today. Time to retire to my simple home.

Ah, the breaking of the dawn! ...Well, uh, I don't actually know if it's morning or not, but, uh, I'm awake now. Resuming my explorations. Seriously, though, this dungeon really is extremely huge. I've been wandering around ever since I got myself lost in this labyrinthine section, and there's no sign of escape. Whenever I hit an intersection, I always take the rightmost fork. I remember hearing that keeping your right hand on the dungeon's wall is a great way to keep yourself from getting lost. It's easier to retrace your steps if you're following a rule, anyway. Plus, I can always follow the trail of silk that I keep unconsciously leaving behind me as I walk.

I continue to steadily step through these labyrinthine corridors, but there's no sign of the exit. I keep Appraisal running in the background, but all it's saying is the usual: labyrinth

wall and labyrinth floor. I don't really have any accurate way to measure my distance, but if I were to low-ball an estimate, I'd say I've walked several dozen kilometers so far. Ugh, now that I'm thinking about it, that really is seriously far! If I were still a human, walking this kind of distance would just straight-up kill me.

Ah, here comes today's first prey. Oooh, and it's a kind I've never seen before! It looks kind of like a centipede, with its many rustling legs. First off: Appraisal.

Elro Ferekt – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Hm? Failed? Ahhh, the level is missing! Huh, looks like Appraisal can fail! It's my first time seeing this happen. Well, it's not like it failing gave me any less information than what I usually get, so it doesn't really matter for now.

Ah, wait, hold on, hold on. Could it maybe have failed because our levels are too different? If that's the case, this centipede would have to be way stronger than me. Hmm? I'm not really getting that kind of feeling off of it, though... maybe level differences don't have any effect on Appraisal at all? That's all well and good, but if it's really just a case where it's hiding its true skill...?

...Man, even if I keep waffling, there isn't really any excuse. Being a woman is all about courage, right? Are we going to do this?!

Without making a noise, I quietly creep behind my foe. _Slide, slide, slide. _Greetings! Die!

My sneak attack was a complete success. It was such a complete success that it was almost an anticlimax. All of that worrying I had been doing about the centipede being crazy tough was all in my head. It wasn't able to rip apart my webs like the turtle could, so I was able to tie it up without any problems. Then I bit it with my poison fangs until it stopped moving.

You'd think you know how disgusting centipedes would taste just from looking at them, but this is seriously gross. On top of that, it's got some weird poison, so after eating it I feel kind of weird. My entire body feels kind of... stiff.

Argh! Ever since I was reborn as a spider, I haven't gotten to eat a single delicious thing! This is seriously a first-world problem, but I want tastier food. Aaaaah, someone, anyone, even a cup noodle will do!

Side Story 2: The Fourth Prince

I feel warm, almost like I'm submerged in pleasant water. I drift, wrapped in this warm embrace, and feel at peace. After a while, this comes to an end, and I'm pushed through a tiny hole into the outside world. I feel uneasy about being pushed out of that warm, safe place, but once I'm out, the world seems to open up before me.

This is my oldest memory.

“Your Highness, please come down from there! You’ll catch a cold.”

As I sit at the window, gazing outside, a maid calls out to me. Just as she says, it is quite cold out there. Everything outside is covered in a thick blanket of snow. Watching the snow fall is quite a pleasant way to pass the time, but it seems like I’ve been sitting here for quite some time. Recently, I seem to lose track of time easily when I’m concentrating.

“Alright, there, up we go!”

The maid *picks me up* and sets me down on the bed. The bed is huge, almost too big for just one person, but there’s already another person here: a very young baby, sleeping pleasantly and soundly. This crib seems to have been custom-made so the two of us could sleep comfortably next to each other.

By now, it should be quite obvious: I am a baby.

It may seem strange for a baby to be able to think so clearly, but I possess all of the faculties that I had in my previous life. I had been a perfectly ordinary, unassuming high school student, but something happened and before I knew it I was suddenly a baby.

It looks like this is reincarnation: the thing where a dead person is reborn as another. This, of course, means that my previous life is over. The last thing I remember was sitting in Japanese Literature. I watched a hole open up in the empty air of the classroom, and then my memories abruptly cut off.

Holes in spacetime do not generally tend to appear on Earth. That's probably what killed me. Then, for some reason, I was reincarnated with my memories from my previous life.

If you were to ask me if I had any regrets, I really couldn't say that I didn't. Far from it, really. I was still in the height of my youth. I wanted to hang out some more with my friends, and I never got the chance to try dating a girl my age. My parents, my grandparents, I died before any of them. I've left them with such a heavy burden. I get depressed whenever I think about how I'm never going to see them again.

I'm worried about what happened to everyone else at school after I died. I remember a huge explosion when that crack opened up in the air. It certainly killed me, but what about everyone else? Kyouya and Kanata... my neighbor Hasebe... did everyone die along with me? If I think about it, that's really scary. That morning, I greeted them like it was no big deal, but now I'll never be able to see them again.

Ever since I was reincarnated, I've been fighting my way through the uneasiness that has been gripping me. Of course I would be uneasy: I was suddenly reborn as a baby, with no knowledge of how I had gotten here. Furthermore, I wasn't reborn in Japan. I wasn't even reborn on Earth. This is another world entirely.

This took me a little while to figure out. I didn't understand anything they were saying, and I haven't been outside this nursery very much, so there's many things that it's taken me a while to learn. At first, I thought that I was in some European country. Then, however, I saw someone use magic, and it was immediately obvious that I had thought wrong.

This world has magic. The first time I saw it was when a high-ranking priest came to bestow a blessing on me. My body was wrapped in a sparkling light, and an overflowing strength welled up within me. You might think that it was a trick, or my imagination, but this was of a level that couldn't be covered by such a trivial explanation. It would be way too hard to fake what I felt then.

I was excited about the existence of magic as soon as I found out about it. Even still, after the initial excitement faded, I was back to being uneasy. Am I going to be able to make it in a world of magic? I was an extremely ordinary guy in my previous life. Back in Japan, this didn't cause me any problems, but this world might not tolerate such an ordinary person. Am I going to be able to live up to what's expected of me? I don't know, and it's making me nervous.

I desperately set to learning the local language. Not being able to understand anyone around me was even worse than I had ever imagined. I had no idea what anyone was saying. I never thought I could ever feel so helpless and alone. I felt so isolated, like I was the only person in the world.

The uneasiness from being reborn into another world, from not knowing the language, from not knowing if I'd be able to survive, all of the these compounding fears weighed heavily on me. I was saved, though, by the baby girl peacefully sleeping next to me. My sister, born of a different mother. She has no worries at all, sleeping peacefully as if nothing in the world could possibly go wrong. Well, it's only natural for a baby. Babies can't do anything without help, and must rely on others to take care of them. A real baby is such a fragile existence. The only reason why I'm so worried is because of all of the memories I've brought with me from my previous life.

That's when I realized. I have all of this experience from before, so I should undoubtedly be stronger, mentally, than my sister. Yet why was she sleeping so peacefully, when I was so burdened by worry? I'm this kid's big brother, and an older brother shouldn't make his little sister worry. I need to be an awesome big brother that she can look up to.

I may have just been putting on a brave face for my sister, but I found myself worrying less and less. My troubles haven't all gone away, but now I have something to hold on to: I want to protect my helpless little sister.

I've focused on learning the language and, little by little, have come to understand what people are saying around me. I wanted to be able to move around as soon as I could, so I flailed my little baby limbs around to gain strength. Thanks to that, I learned to crawl far earlier than most babies. I kept my motivation up by remembering that I was going to be the kind of older brother that my sister was going to want to brag about.

Thus begins the story of the fourth prince of the Analeicht Kingdom, Slaine Zagan Analeicht.

Chapter 21: HP/MP/SP

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

Oh, finally! Appraisal’s level went up! The information barrage hasn’t really been making me woozy lately, so this is great timing. Now, what will you show me this time, Appraisal?
> Small Lesser Taratekt — LV 6 — (no name)

Huh? There’s... no change? No, wait, underneath my species name, there’s a few horizontal colored lines. What are these...?

HP Gauge

I unintentionally Appraised the green line on top, so now it’s quite obvious what it represents. “HP” is an abstraction that show up in so many video games, after all. It stands for “hit points”, but what’s important is that it’s a representation of my physical health. When I take damage, they’re depleted, and when I run out, well, game over. This new meter has appeared in my Appraisal results!

This is a pleasant surprise! Until now, I’ve had to estimate how much damage I’d taken in my head, and didn’t really have any other good way to check. Now, I’ve got an health bar, so I can tell at a glance what my condition is like!

Right now, my health bar is just about full. It looks like it might be a little bit decreased: at the very right of the bar, there’s a short little black section. Ummmm... I really would like to figure out how to get actual numbers out of this, but even still, this is a real luxury.

Now, under my health bar are three more bars. Let’s start by checking out this blue one, immediately below my HP.

MP Gauge

Ah, that's to be expected. If there's HP, there's got to be MP. This must be showing how much magic power I have available! Of course, since I have no idea how to cast any of my magic, it's not like I really care... It probably only goes down when you cast a spell, and since I have no spells to cast, this is probably never going to drop.

The real puzzle is the identity of these last two bars. One's yellow and the other's red, and they're arranged so closely together that they almost look like one bar. I have no clue what these could possibly represent! Welp... Appraise.

SP Gauge

Hm? SP? Skill Points? Hmm? Why would I need a bar for those? Wait, I'm jumping to conclusions again. This probably isn't for skill points. SP is an abbreviation, but I have no good ideas of what it could stand for. Well, let's go ahead and Appraise "SP".

SP: Stamina points.

Oh? Aaaah! It really isn't skill points, but a different word with the same first letter! That's way too confusing.

Hoofh. Even so, "stamina", huh. Is this the physical equivalent of my mana bar? Is it going to go down when I exercise? Hmm? Wait, why are there two meters for it, and why is the yellow bar on top full up while the red one on bottom already has a third of it missing? What's the difference? Let's try running "stamina points" through Appraisal.

Stamina points: *points that are consumed through exercise.*

Ah, yep. I still don't get it. Ohh, well, if I keep an eye on it, I'll be able to figure it out eventually, right? If I can, I should try to figure out how to keep this Appraisal notification open so that I can always see my health bar. Maybe I can set Appraisal to continuously cast on myself... like... this? Ah, yeah! Not bad, if I do say so myself. Now I can always look to see how much health I have, unless I take it down voluntarily. This is seriously convenient!

Although... it really is convenient to see my own meters... but isn't seeing my enemy's HP and MP going to give me a ridiculous advantage? I can look at its health to figure out how many more hits it's got left in it, and if it's a magic user I can keep an eye on its MP so that I can figure out when it's my turn to strike. It's not like I've found any magic-specialized monsters so far, though. Regardless, being able to know even a tiny bit of the opponent's stats is a huge advantage in combat! Ah, Appraisal, how could I have doubted how god-tier OP you were? Heheheh. I saw this coming! I deliberately picked up such a useless skill because I knew it was going to grow into something wonderful. Of course I knew it was going to be useless from the start! You can't prove otherwise!

Well now, eyes forward, marching, marching. Oh! Found a monster.

Elro Ferekt — LV 3 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

I would like to retract my previous statement. This is useless after all! How did I make such a serious mistake...? Ugh, I'm such an idiot for getting my hopes up.

Regardless, here's another centipede. What to do? Hmm. A sneak attack might not really work. It hasn't spotted me yet, but it's facing this way, so I'm not going to be able to get behind it.

Wait, I just had a brilliant idea!

I stealthily creep up the wall and make my way towards the ceiling. Having a spider's body sure is convenient sometimes! Oop, hanging upside down on a ceiling is actually pretty tricky. It's not that bad, though, if I brace myself well I'm in no danger of falling.

Like this, I slowly creep along the ceiling. You can do it, legs! ...Hm? Oh, my stamina bar is going down! No time for that now, though, I have a plan to concentrate on.

I arrive over the unsuspecting centipede. All right! I'm so close, yet he doesn't see me. I stick a thread to the ceiling, and slowly descend until I'm right behind him.

Then I leap! The centipede tenses up in fear, but it's far too late! I spin it around and around, rolling it up in my silk, and then I go in for the kill! *Chomp!* Ahahaha! How do you like my new strategy, codenamed “look out, I’m right above you”?! I’d say it’s a pretty overwhelming success!

Well, once again, time to eat.

Umf. As I eat, I go back to contemplating my stamina bar. While I was clinging to the ceiling, the yellow bar was steadily decreasing. When I braced myself, the rate of change went down a little bit. Now, though, it’s completely back up to full. Hm?

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Paralysis Resistance (LV 1)].”

Oh... oh!! Centipede, you were hiding a paralysis attack from me?! Man, if my sneak attacks hadn’t worked, these fights would have been way tougher. I’m going to have to be more careful next time.

Hm? Hmm? Doesn’t it look like the lower red part of my stamina bar is increasing? I remember it being about a third of the way empty, but it’s slowly been creeping back up. It’s only a quarter empty, now. Why, I wonder? Why would my stamina start increasing...?

...Oh, yeah, I ate something. Aha! That’s it! I see, I see! I think I understand a little bit.

To summarize, it looks like the red bottom bar represents how much overall energy I can muster in the long term. That means the yellow one on top represents my short-term stamina?

To test it out, I took off running at full speed, causing the yellow bar to start draining very quickly. It soon ran out completely, perfectly coinciding with me exhausting my last bit of strength.

Wheeze, wheeze.

Ugh, going for a run immediately after eating, I must be some kind of idiot. My stomach really hurts. Seriously.

This clinches it, though. The yellow bar is my instantaneous energy reserves. If that runs out, I'll be left here trying to catch my breath. It seems to recover just as quickly as it's depleted, though. After I got my breathing under control, it started filling right back up.

So, the red bar on the bottom must be my overall endurance. After all that running, it went down just a little bit. Man, I don't know what would happen if my endurance meter hit zero, but it can't be good. Maybe I won't be able to move at all, and that's one of the least punishing things that come to mind. It looks like it's recovered via eating, but I'm definitely going to need to keep an eye on this.

Chapter 22: The Spider Silk Experiments

My explorations of this labyrinth are going fairly well. In fact, everything's going so well that I'd be laughing out loud if I had lungs. This part of the labyrinth seems to be the territory of the centipedes, so there's a lot of them here. They've been super accommodating in helping me gather XP! Their reaction times are extremely slow, so I've had no problems at all catching them with my sneak attacks. Whether it's from behind or above, my victory is almost always assured. Thanks to that, defeating them is easy!

I've killed a ton of these so far, and my level has gone all the way up to seven. Unfortunately I didn't receive any level-up bonuses to my skills, but constantly eating this paralytic meat has brought my Paralysis Resistance up to 2. This place is great! I can farm up XP, and I can even work on leveling my ever-useful Paralysis Resistance. What an excellent hunting ground.

Of course, it hasn't been 100% perfectly easy. I'm still diligently trying to gain more practical combat experience, so I've been experimenting with variations on my sneak attack.

The biggest weakness of my threads is that I can only release it from my bottom. As such, if I want to stick any silk onto my opponents, I have to point my butt at them. I have to pose propped up on my two hind legs and stick my butt way out, or otherwise face directly away from my opponent. This is, of course, is a very vulnerable position to be in, so in order to compensate I've been either attaching my silk while I'm already on top of my enemy, or I bombard them with it while I jump overhead.

Even still, those are still pretty dangerous methods. Sure, if my threads hit, then my victory is basically set in stone. However, if I miss... there's a huge chance it will seriously backfire. If I'm on top of my opponent, dodging their counterattacks is extremely difficult; likewise, if I'm soaring through the air, I'm at serious risk of being shot down like my idiot brother did back then. It's not quite what you'd call a "high-risk, high-reward" strategy.

Well, once I'd acknowledged the problem, the next step was to come up with some new strategies to keep myself safe against enemies I can't get my threads attached. The solution is this, my new weapon: the portable web! Basically, I've got a tiny little web stretched between my forelegs. It gets rid of the vulnerable-stance problem, since I can easily hit with it while charging forward. Now that I no longer need to stick my butt out in that unbelievable stance to get my opponent stuck, this is going to be way easier.

Of course, there are drawbacks. While I've got one of these webs on standby, my forelegs are otherwise useless. Yeah, I've still got six more legs, but it's still pretty inconvenient. The other problem is that I have to make these well in advance. Well, luckily for me, I'm a pro at building nets, so it wouldn't be that bad.

This is quite a magnificent low-risk, high-reward tactic!

I tried a bunch of other things, but all of them ended in failure.

I wanted to come up with a strategy to protect me against the sneak attacks of others, so I dug up my old idea of an enemy-detecting thread. The basic idea is to have a whole bunch of invisibly-fine threads floating in the air. If they were to catch on something, like, say, an enemy, I'd feel the vibration and be able to react. This is a similar idea to how I had a bunch of fine threads strung up in and around my home, but, in practice... there's a few differences between stringing something up and letting it float around.

My unattended seeker-threads had the unfortunate tendency to bump into either themselves or the wall. Of course, this caused them to constantly vibrate, one after another, which wound up being a huge distraction. I could probably sort it out in my head if I were to concentrate hard enough, but then I wouldn't be paying attention to anything else, which is really putting the cart before the horse. For now, I have to put my plans for an enemy-seeking thread aside.

Next, I wanted to try making myself some silken armor to try to shore up my terrible defenses. The results, I have to say, were awful. It's not like I can't make any clothing, but wearing it is basically impossible. I'm a spider, you know? I don't have useable hands like

I did when I was a human, and my body's got a really weird shape to it, so no matter how hard I tried I couldn't figure out how to get anything on.

How about just wrapping myself in thread, you ask? That's also no good. I can certainly get a bunch of thread wrapped around me, but unless I do it perfectly, it's probably just going to wind up getting tangled around me and restricting my movements. My speed is my greatest asset, you know? If I were to do it, I'd have to wrap myself up super carefully... which doesn't work for the same reasons that make it impossible to wear normal clothes in the first place.

Even still, if I somehow managed to get some sort of armor on, it's useless if it's not something I can take off easily. When I eat, for instance, my body tends to inflate. If I'm wearing any sort of restrictive clothing when I start swelling up like a ball, wouldn't that be extremely painful?

Things might be a little bit different if I could borrow someone's time to help me get in and out of my armor, but without human hands or even the ability to see most of my body, I'm going to have to abandon this idea.

Ummf. Now that I'm thinking about it, being a spider has its pluses and minuses. I can leap through the air and cling to the walls, but not having hands seriously puts a huge damper on my abilities. Human hands are superbly useful. I now understand this from the bottom of my heart.

Incidentally, all of this experimentation didn't get my Spider Silk skill level up at all. Yeah, as I thought, a high-level skill has much higher proficiency requirements for advancement. Well, it's not like I can really spend a bunch of time meaninglessly spewing out thread, like I was doing back in my home. Running around outside is way more dangerous than the safety of my home, so I want to make sure I'm in top form at all times. I could only really experiment as much as I did because there's plenty of food around here in the form of centipedes.

This round of experiments was fraught with failure, but quite a few valuable things. In the future, I'll keep an eye out for even more opportunities to try some new things out.

Chapter 23: I got carried away! I'm sorry! Forgive me!

Today, like every other day, I'm hunting centipedes. Maaan. It's Centipede Heaven, here! They look pretty gross, but they're really pretty awesome prey if you don't look at them too closely. Well, my sensibilities really aren't so delicate. I think their rusty little legs are actually kind of charming. Centipedes are the best!

My Paralysis Resistance skill is up to level three, and I'm going to hit level eight soon, right? Seriously, thank you, little buddies.

Just now, I tried to see if I could take two of them on at once, and I did remarkably well, considering. The first one I did in with a sneak attack, but the second I had a pretty tense battle with. In a straight-up fight, centipedes seem to be remarkably quick! Hah, well, not as quick as me. It looks like their attacks are largely limited to biting. Their paralytic venom would probably do me in if I were to get bitten... but, y'know, if I don't get hit, there's no problem at all. As long as I'm wary of the bite, everything else is easy. I've finally found an entire race of beings weaker than me!

It looks it's not just sneak attacks that are effective against these guys. I can hit them straight-on too! MwahahaHA! I'm so STROOOONG! I almost can't stop laughing.

They're also super-easy to eat, which is awesome. They may look huge when they're still rustling around, but the actual volume of meat inside is surprisingly small. One of them is enough to sate my appetite in the short term, but is nowhere near enough to fill me up entirely. Thus, I've been eating every scrap of every centipede I've encountered, leaving nothing behind. Waste not, want not. I'm a pretty frugal person, so I well understand that waste is the greatest of sins. These centipedes are great, though, since I can eat the entire thing and not need to worry about wasting anything.

It's really quite nice of the centipedes, to be born solely for the purpose of filling my belly! Ehehehehhh. I've been living my life super-cautiously until now, so it really can't hurt me to have some fun once in a while?

Humming and exploring, humming and exploring~! Well, I don't really have any way to hum for real, so I was just humming in my head. ...Vocal cords aside, do I even have a nose to begin with? Ah, well, doesn't matter.

Oh? Looks like the path forks here. Neither of them look much like a dead end though.

It's a little weird. This labyrinth is enormous, and I haven't seen a single dead end! While I've been exploring the labyrinth, I haven't hit any parts of a path where I needed to think about turning around. It's great to know that I'm not going to run out of corridor if I'm being chased by something, but thinking about how huge this dungeon must be just makes me sigh.

What if this world, this entire world, is just one big underground dungeon? I don't think that's the case, but I've certainly not been able to find an exit, much less leave and take a look at the outside myself. It really could be true.

I'm sure that the outside world exists, but even so, there's a chance that my ineptitude could wind up making me live out my entire life in this dungeon. If that's the case, I'd really like to die of old age while searching for the exit, but it's way more likely that I'll end up dying prematurely. Hm, I was just thinking about old age, but I have no idea what my natural lifespan actually is. Just based solely on size, might I live only about as long as a large dog? At the very least, I'd like to live longer than I did in my previous life.

Well, let's put these useless thoughts aside.

The path forks at the top of a huge cliff. Before me, an enormous cavern yawns. Has my journey through these maze-like tunnels finally come to an end? I wonder what's next! I really hope it's not a super-dangerous zone like the one I was born in, with all of the cannibalism and the giant spiders and the huge crowds of monsters. It doesn't matter how long my lifespan is, it's not enough to deal with all of that.

Ah, anyhow, what should I do now? I quickly glance down into the pit.

Elro Ferekt – LV 2 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Elro Ferekt – LV 2 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Elro Ferekt – LV 2 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Elro Ferekt – LV 2 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Elro Ferekt – LV 2 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Elro Ferekt – LV 2 – (*failed to appraise statistics*) and so on, and so on.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5.”

Grrk! My... head... HURTS! Information from Appraisal blasts into my brain like a punch to the face. Whoa, I almost passed out. That was bad, that was bad. If I overdo it with Appraisal, I'll get too much information for my brain to handle, leaving me with a monstrous headache. Well this is useful information to have, now isn't it! Fainting would have only been natural.

.....Hang on, I was too busy not passing out, what did Appraisal tell me?

I deliberately look over the edge of the cliff. Yeah, it's a cliff, but it really only looks like it's one meter deep. The cavern before me is pretty huge, but it really doesn't feel like a vast, empty space. After all, it's completely covered in centipedes.

Whaa?!

What what what what what?!?! Centipedes! Centipedes!!!! All I see are centipeeeeeedes!!!! This is disgusting! This goes beyond just gross, this is straight-up disgusting.

Hmm? Centipedes, might I ask what you are looking at? Me? I can't imagine why you'd all be looking at...

I need to get out of here. I must become the wind! Quickly, from whence I came!

Rumblerumblerumblerumblerumble!!

Eeeeeek! They're chasing me! They're chasing me! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!! I got carried away!!! Forgive me! Seriously, please!! Forgive mee!!

My yellow stamina meter is empty. Ugh, it hurts to keep going, but if I stop, I die!! I don't care if it hurts as bad as dying, I must! Keep! Going!! In place of my yellow meter, the red one starts to slowly decrease.

In the end, although it cost me about half of my red stamina bar, I escaped the army of centipedes.

Man, I seriously thought I was going to die.

Chapter 24: Weak

Haaah. Centipedes are scary. Seriously, what just happened? Man, that swarming mass of violence struck fear into my heart. Ugh. I'm beat. My yellow stamina meter, which shows my short-term energy, ran out, but I kept running and running. My legs are trembling! I should really call it quits for today.

I turn around one more time, just to see if the centipede brigade has caught up to me. Good, all clear, all clear. I string up my threads, and put together another simple home. As soon as I feel like I'm safe within my webs, all of the strength leaves my body.

Ahh, well, that was pretty traumatic. They're pretty weak one-on-one, but if there's that many of them? Seriously dangerous. Plus, those things can paralyze me! If one of them managed to bite me just once, I'd fall prey to their paralytic venom. All that's left after that would be to drag my immobile body back to their nest and slowly devour me. Even just thinking about it is awful.

I really should have been asking myself why there were so many centipedes around here. I mean, not just that, but, why wasn't I wondering where the other monsters were? Centipedes are weak as hell. These guys make such good prey! Why didn't I think it was odd that there weren't any other predators feeding on these guys? Maybe they didn't want to eat centipedes because of the paralytic poison, but, seriously, this is a dungeon filled with poison-attribute monsters. That's a pretty flimsy excuse.

So, either all of the other monsters around here know to steer clear of the centipedes, or the centipedes used their numbers to sweep in and murder any intruders. My speed's at the level where I was just barely able to escape, but that might be way trickier for the other monsters. Getting bit while running away, and then getting set upon by uncountable centipedes? Way. Too. Scary. to think about.

Us weak monsters need to come up with ways to work around our weaknesses, if we want to survive. I, for instance, really suck in a straight-up fight, but I can kill things way

stronger than me once I've got them trapped in my webs. It's because I'm so weak that I can't afford to slip up. I think I've learned my lesson, this time.

I've somehow been able to live pretty securely as of late, and, really, these centipedes are tasty. Thanks to all that, grinding up my level has been remarkably easy.

Oh, that reminds me! When I accidentally appraised the entire centipede brigade at once, Appraisal's level went up! Talk about a lucky strike, seriously. Well, first off, I should take a closer look at the Appraisal results that I'm constantly pulling up on myself. I didn't really have time to do that while I was being chased by that centipede swarm.

Small Lesser Taratekt – LV 7 – (no name) Statistics: Weak

Are you kidd... “Statistics: Weak”?! That's way too harsh! I mean, I know I'm weak, but still... could you maybe try being a little less blunt! Man, if Appraisal is calling me weak, then I guess that really does mean that I'm weak in the eyes of the world. Haaaaah. I slump defeatedly.

Wait, no, wasn't I just thinking that I couldn't let myself get careless, even around weak enemies? I have my silk! Sure, I might be physically weak, but my silk is strong! Defeat isn't in my vocabulary, if I've got my silk. So, seriously, why are you calling me weak? I might be a bit biased, but I'm pretty strong if I can gain an advantage! Whether I lure them into a silken trap or sneak up on them from above, immobilizing my opponent and finishing it off with my poison fangs is painless. Yeah. I fight really dirty. It's interesting, though, to see just how quickly I go back to being weak once I'm confronted face-to-face.

Really, the problem is figuring out how to keep everyone playing on my terms. If I let my opponents set the pace of the fight, all of my advantages are worthless. Ah, well, it's not a big problem if I can manage to keep control of things every time, you know.

Well, I'm tired, I'm going to get some sleep.

I've woken up. I'm still weighed down by fatigue, but I've woken up nonetheless. What is this... sensation? I don't really know, but I've got a bad feeling about it.

I hurriedly get up and run over to start adding additional threads to my simple home. There, the source of my troubles is revealed.

Elro Baldarad — LV 9 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

It's a colossal snake, big enough around to swallow a person whole, and at least ten meters long. By looks alone, it's strong. Plus, it's level nine. This is the first time I've seen a monster that's higher level than me. Actually, this is the first time I've seen a monster that's this high-leveled at all! The highest so far has been level four, and in one jump that number's gone up to nine.

It's obviously higher up on the food chain than I am, and its level is higher too. I've got no chance at all if it comes to a fight. I'm seriously breaking out in a cold sweat.

I'm frozen like a deer in the headlights. Er, like a spider in the headlights.¹ My body is rigid with fear, but I somehow make myself move. I slowly back up, putting some distance between myself and the snake.

The snake doesn't just let that happen.

Paying no heed to my webs, it thrusts itself forward! It, of course, gets stuck, but it writhes around, tearing my webs from the walls! I turn around and start running as fast as I can. I slip through the gaps in my simple home to the outside, but in an instant the snake is right behind me, tearing at the webs I just passed through.

My instincts are screaming at me to flee. I don't think I will, though. I saw it. The snake is getting tangled in my webs. It may be able to break them down, but it can't get them off of it completely. Now, it's got the remnants of the first set of webs clinging to it, in addition to being caught in my second set.

I can do this! This fight is on my terms.

I leap onto the snake as it writhes. I immediately start biting at it, while simultaneously spewing more silk from my rear. I somehow pierce through its thick scales, and hit it with my Poison Fang!

The snake starts thrashing as the poison courses through its body. Even though I've bound it with so much silk, it's able to fling itself about with a ton of force! I'm flung against the walls and the ceiling over and over, but I pull through and keep fighting with raw grit and will!

My yellow stamina meter is draining, and my green health meter goes down every time I'm flung against the wall. My red stamina meter also seems to be decreasing with every thread I release. If that runs out, I probably won't be able to release any more threads. It's only a matter of time, then, before the snake will be able to tear itself free. I have to beat it before that happens.

I keep biting and spraying threads with reckless abandon. Gradually, gradually, the snake's struggles grow weak. I've long since exhausted my yellow meter, and my red meter is down to about ten percent, but the snake finally stops moving entirely.

Just because I'm weak, doesn't mean you can take me lightly!

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *More idioms!* The original phrase is something like “A frog caught in a snake’s glare” (蛇に睨まれた蛙), which basically just means that the speaker is frozen, paralyzed in shock. Unfortunately we don’t have an idiom in English that simultaneously mentions snakes and captures the feel of a creature frozen in fear,

so I had to go with “deer in the headlights” so that I could more accurately preserve the joke. (“I’m like a frog, no wait, a spider, caught in a snake’s glare” would be more literal.)

Chapter 25. Tasty, tasty snake

“Experience requirements met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you have grown from level 7 to level 8. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Pain Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

“Experience requirements met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you have grown from level 8 to level 9. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Poison Fang (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6 and your skill [Night Vision (LV 9)] has been raised to level 10. Your [Night Vision] skill has reached its maximum level, and a new skill, [Visible Range Expansion (LV 1)] has been unlocked. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Whoa, that's a huge amount of growth. Looks like beating a foe much stronger than you gives a ton of experience, no matter what world you're in. In the blink of an eye, my level went up by two.

That snake was certainly quite a formidable opponent. If it had been a full-on fight, there's not even a sliver of a chance that I would have won. A powerful body. A hide covered in extremely tough scales. Speed that might even eclipse mine, if the few times it lunged at me were any indication. To top it all off, venom. As a snake, there is no doubt that its bite carries a powerful venom.

Even after restraining it, I think my odds were still only about 50/50. Leveling up may have fully healed all of my wounds, but I had taken a tremendous amount of damage before then. My stamina is only just barely still positive. That was seriously dangerous.

But to go with that huge risk, the return was equally huge, you know! When I was tirelessly overhunting those centipedes, I felt like I was on a nice, steady path to eventually becoming level eight. I never thought that jumping all the way up to level nine in one go was even possible!

I'm definitely excited about leveling up, but the skill increases I got were also huge! Pain Resistance going up is nice on its own, but Poison Fang went up as well! It's one of my biggest trump cards, second only to Spider Silk. As Poison Fang grows, so does my offensive capacity. Well, hm, it's definitely worth remembering that Poison Fang is basically my only offensive options, so it would be really awful to face something with a high tolerance for poison.

Next up is probably the most interesting one from this level-up: Night Vision. Yeah. Now that it was brought up, it's really not strange at all that I should have it. The light of the sun doesn't, of course, reach this deep into the dungeon. In fact, there's no light at all! Yet I can still see clearly in this inky blackness. I'm actually a little surprised that this is because of a skill, I had honestly thought that it was part of the whole spider package.

So, when Night Vision leveled up, my vision seemed to sharpen. What once was murky is now clear and bright. I can clearly and distinctly make out the scenery around me. Skills must max out at level ten. If that weren't the case, then this could level up even more, and I have no idea how my night vision could possibly get any better. Ah, well, maybe it's just Night Vision that has only ten levels.

So, when Night Vision leveled up to ten, as a bonus, I acquired the related skill "Visible Range Expansion" out of nowhere. That's great and all, but I have no idea what it could possibly do! Judging by the name, I thought that it might increase the physical range of my vision, but it really doesn't seem like that's the case. Well, I guess I'll throw this one onto the piles of skills I know nothing about but their name.

At times like these, I really wish I had the ability to appraise my skills. Unfortunately, the only valid targets for Appraisal are things that I can see, and I only know the skill names because the "Voice of Heaven" *said them out loud*. If it's not a thing that's in front of me, I can't appraise it. The Appraisal results, though, feel like they're being written out in my brain. I can see them with my mind's eye, which I guess counts enough.

If I can get Appraisal's level up high enough, maybe my skills will start being displayed as part of the results. Then I'd be able to appraise them directly. Well, until that time, I don't really have much choice but to set these unknown and unusable skills aside.

Well then, let's take this huge thing that I just barely managed to kill... and eat it! To start, I put up a new simple home so that other monsters wouldn't want to barge in on me and steal a piece. This thing is absolutely huge, so huge that I probably won't be able to eat it all in one go. I should stick around here, then, until I've finished it all up. I'll put extra care into making this simple home perfect.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Spider Silk (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

Oh, here's another good thing! The Spider Thread skill, which almost never seemed to acquire any experience, finally leveled up. What have I been doing differently? Did this happen because I was using my threads so heavily while fighting the snake? My two primary offensive skills are Poison Fang and Spider Silk, so if I keep fighting, they will of course be going up as well. Seriously, the stat points I get on level-up don't seem to have anywhere near as strong of an effect on my combat effectiveness as my skills do.

Humming to myself, I get back to eating my lunch. Before that, though, I need to peel all of these scales off. These things are seriously way too damn hard! There's no way I can eat them. I really have to do this, otherwise I won't be able to eat at all.

I got them all offffff! Ugggh, I'm beat. That was way more tedious work than I thought. The scales are very tough, and they don't peel off easily, so it took a very long time. It took off nearly a quarter of the red overall-stamina meter, even after leveling up had raised it back up to full! This was definitely heavy labor.

But now, thanks to that, I can eat as freely as I want! So, let's dig in.

Ewwh, bitter! Way too bitter! Is this the poison? If it's this bitter, then this guy must have had a ridiculously powerful venom. Man, it would have been awful if I had gotten bit!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Resistance (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”

Yep. The meat may be bitter, but the skill rank sure is sweet.

Chapter 26: Anti-shut-inification

It's been a while since I defeated the snake. There's no real way for me to measure time here in the dungeon, so I don't really know how long it's been. In the meantime, all I've really been doing is eating and sleeping. I'm still not done eating the snake, and new food keeps getting itself caught up in my webs, so I can't really leave. I started out by thinking this was a nice little vacation, but I'm starting to get a little worried. If this keeps up, I'm going to become a shut-in again!

I've accidentally amassed quite a mound of monster corpses. Seriously, yeah, a mound of bodies. ...heh, Yamada's body.¹ Y'know, Yamada, a dude from my class? Back in my previous life? Ah, nah, well, it's not like that matters anymore.

What's important is that this pile of meat just won't stop getting taller. I have been diligently killing every single thing that gets stuck in my webs, then onto the pile it goes. Back when I was still living in my real home, I'd eat everything as soon as I caught it. Now, though, I've got this snake to go through, and I don't want to start anything else until I'm done with that, so... yeah, I'm building up quite a pile.

There haven't been any ridiculous bodybuilders who can rip through my webs like that snake did, so for the most part killing everything has been super easy. At some point, a level six monster showed up, and it certainly was strong! ...It's in the pile now, though. Well, just because you've got a high level doesn't mean you're actually strong.

I'm level nine. Going by level alone, I'm on even footing with where that snake was. But the difference in raw battle power is straight-up overwhelming. I wouldn't even trust myself to fight some of these lower-level monsters outside of my webs!

I really think that there's some kind of species factor that weighs much more heavily into strength than level. If I fought against a foe of a superior species, I'd be at a serious disadvantage, even if we were the same level. You'd think that the difference in level would be a good indicator of relative strength, but it really looks like it only works like that when it's two members of the same species. To give a really extreme example, imagine if that

enormous spider from back then was only level one. There's absolutely no way I could win that fight. No matter how hard I tried, a fight against something that huge would end in a flash. I really should be thinking of the difference in level as more of a suggestion.

Now that I think about it, though, when I was fighting that snake, it might have even had a level advantage! Through sheer chance, I only encountered it after I'd put together this simple home to rest in, which is basically the only reason I was able to win. If I were to have come across it unprepared, that would have been it.

So far, three quarters of this snake have vanished into my belly. Man, should I be thinking that I got through three quarters of that enormous thing, or that I still have one more quarter to go? Hm, with the flow of monsters steadily accumulating on top of my pile, I should probably think of it as still having a quarter left.

With this much stored up, there's a serious risk that this stuff is going to start rotting before I can get to it. I mean, I have Decay Resistance, so eating spoiled food might not be the worst thing I could do to my stomach. Even better, if it's just a little bit rotten, I might be able to grind up Decay Resistance's level while I eat! The taste? Man, I've been forcing myself to choke down all this disgustingly bitter poisonous food, I'm sure I can handle a little bit of rot.

Umf. Really, I can't leave until I've gone through all of this food. I think that, if I can somehow finally finish off the rest of this snake, I'll be able to get through the rest of my stores faster than they can accumulate. Assuming, of course, that another huge monster doesn't show up before then. Seriously, if I don't finish this up soon, I'm going to revert back into a crazy shut-in. I may have designed this home as a temporary one, but I've been stuck here long enough that it's been getting built-up almost as my previous full-scale home.

Hm? Wait, you say? Why would I strengthen my home when all that's going to do is make it catch more monsters, you ask? Hmmffff?

Nah. Any monster who dares lay eyes upon this fortress will almost certainly flee. My previous home had been designed to lure and catch prey, so my webs had been built out of

extremely fine silk, almost impossible to see. This home, though, is built out of thick, tough threads.

Oh, what a coincidence, my webs are vibrating again. Seems like yet another thing has blundered into them. Oof. My food supplies are still increasing, aren't they. I really didn't think gluttony would be so troublesome.

To start with, I walk over to where my prey have been ensnared. It sure seems to be struggling a ton; have I caught another huge monster? If that's the case then there's no way I'm going to be finishing up my food stores anytime soon, which will lead me even further down the path of the shut-in. I was really hoping for a small one! Ugh, too much food. First world problems.

Elro Randanel – LV 3 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Elro Randanel – LV 3 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Elro Randanel – LV 4 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

I caught three things this time, in one go. Ahhhh, are these the same three that I dealt with back at my original home? Don't tell me these all come as a set. Getting three things at the same time is definitely way more than one big thing. ...In terms of meat, that is.

I tie them all up more securely, pull them out of my web, then wrap all three of them together. This kind of releasable web is a new technique I came up with over the last few days. It's super convenient, I don't have to painstakingly cut through each thread to get things out.

I fix up the hole real quick, then make my way back inside while dragging my bundle. Ugh, this is seriously heavy, dragging all three of them. It would have been a huge pain, but I really should have carried these things in one by one.

HrrrrRRRAGH! Whew, that was heavy to the point where I'm seriously hurting. Did I strain something? My HP certainly went down. Damn it. I'm going to take it out on these jerks! Sure, this might be extremely unfair, but they're in no position to complain!

So, then, *chomp! Chomp! Chomp!*

“Experience requirements met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you have grown from level 9 to level 10. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up. You have acquired additional skill points.”

“Level requirement met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you are eligible for evolution.”

Uh, what?

Translator’s Notes for this chapter:

1. *There is an extremely stupid language-locked pun here that I struggled for literally half an hour coming up with a translation to. More literally, it’s “The prey that I’ve killed these past few days are stacked high as a mountain. A mountain... yes, a mountain. (‘yama... sou, yama da.’) It’s not Yamada, though.” I have done my very best to localize it, at the cost of somewhat altering the meaning. Please enjoy the bloody, mangled corpse of what was already a stupid pun.*

Chapter 27: I'm evolving!!!

As I leveled up, I was informed of something completely unexpected. “Evolution”, was it? Is that... what I think it is...? Like in that one game, where you catch and raise, uh, pocket monsters, right?

“You have a choice in evolutionary forms. Please choose between [Lesser Taratekt] and [Small Taratekt].”

Oh... oh! Ummm, hang on, one sec. Uno momento, por favor.

Okay, let’s think this through. This kind of thing is a huge turning point in a person’s life. I’m not a person, though, I’m a spider. There’s no way I’m going to just pick one randomly.

I’m going to evolve. Well, that’s okay. This world’s basically a game, right? It’s totally not unthinkable for video game evolution to be a thing here. Man, once we start digging, there’s no end to the similarities, is there.

Well, when you say “evolution”, it really makes me think of a powerup. I’m given the option to evolve, but I really don’t have a choice, right? Right. Although... I do remember that there were some games where not evolving was advantageous sometimes. Eh, but those were seriously in the minority of games, so I think evolving is a pretty safe choice.

The problem is, there are two different forms that I have to choose between. “Lesser Taratekt” and “Small Taratekt”. Going by the names alone, there’s really not that much difference. I’m getting rid of either “Lesser” or “Small” from my species. Aaaaargh, why can’t I use Appraisal on what the “Voice of Heaven” says?! I’d be able to find out these differences immediately!

Hmmmm. Well, let’s just take a stab at it. A Lesser Taratekt is... probably the adult form of my current species, since I’m just dropping “small” from the name. A Small Taratekt, though, is dropping “lesser”. Does that mean that I’d no longer be an “inferior breed” of Taratekt? I’d still be small, though, so I’d still be just a hatchling.

If I'm thinking along the right lines here, and I think I am, my choice is obvious.

It's gotta be Small Taratekt.

I really don't think staying as an "inferior breed" is a good idea. Think about it. If I pick Small Taratekt, I'm guaranteed to have at least one more evolution, from Small Taratekt to a regular Taratekt. I don't know what exactly will change when I evolve, but I know that it's going to be a good power boost, so I should really pick the option that seems like it will give me the most options down the road. Sure, you might want to think that a Lesser Taratekt might also have evolution options, but there's no way I'm going to make such an important decision off of such an unfounded hope.

On top of that, if I become a Lesser Taratekt, I'm probably going to grow larger. This is, quite frankly, terrifying. Adults are, of course, bigger than children, but usually a creature gets bigger gradually. In this ridiculous fantasy world, though, growing up via evolution may work in a "POOF! You're big now!!" kind of fashion. And, really, since I can't guarantee that isn't actually the case, I really, really shouldn't pick that option. I don't think I'd get quite as large as that enormous spider from earlier, but there's a definite possibility that I'd grow too big to fit through these tunnels.

I remember seeing a huge monster, a Finjegoat, a while ago. It was so big that it had trouble fitting down these passageways, even if they're three meters wide. Trying to move around while being that large would seriously suck. Finjegoats probably normally live in a much more spacious part of the cave so, I'd bet that one had gotten lost and wound up in these smaller tunnels.

Since getting big would make it hard for me to move, I'd really rather remain the size I'm at now. So, that's another point in the Small Taratekt's favor.

Right. I've decided. I shall evolve... into a Small Taratekt!!

"Small Lesser Taratekt, you are now evolving into a Small Taratekt."

Ah, yep. This started really quickly. The Voice of Heaven(???) blasted its way into my head as unceremoniously as usual, even though this is such a momentous occasion! Please, be a little more respectful! I'm trying very hard to ev...o...l.....v.....e.....

“Evolution has completed. You have become a Small Taratekt. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from evolving: your skill [Taboo (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill [Corruption Magic (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill [Decay Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, and your skill [Kartikeya (LV 1)] has been increased to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Whoa!? Eh? Heh? Did... did I fall asleep?! Wait, no, that really felt more like my consciousness was shattered apart, with how quickly it faded. Did evolving cause this? Hey! Voice of Heaven!! It would have been just a tiny little bit nice to know that evolution causes sudden unconsciousness!!

Hmm? Wait, am I done evolving? I can't really see any differences, physically... ah! Appraisal got turned off. Let me turn it back on real quick, so that I can confirm things for myself...

Small Taratekt — LV 1 — (no name) Statistics: Weak

Oh! Ohhh... ohh? Hmmmmmm? The species name changed! Does that mean evolution was successful? ...Level one, though? Like, does evolving decrease my level? ...Oh no, does it reduce my stats as well?! I have no way to compare! Appraisal still only says I'm weak! ...Ugh, it still only says I'm weak...

Ah, but, now that I'm looking, I can see that my red general-stamina meter has somehow completely emptied it self. Plus, the sluggishness I was feeling from overeating is gone. ...I'm really hungry now. Did evolving seriously burn through all of the food that I had eaten? Well, uh, it's a good thing that I'd been stockpiling so much.

You know, I'm actually really glad this evolution happened safely, because it's risky as hell. I lose consciousness and wake up starving. Next time this happens, I'm going to need to make sure I'm well-prepared.

Chapter 28: Eating, eating, eating

In order to restore the stamina that nearly ran out while I was evolving, I've been doing nothing but eating. First to go was the rest of the snake. All of that meat that I was having so much trouble eating before now rests within my belly.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Resistance (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

Just as I finished eating the snake, Poison Resistance's level went up. I got two skill levels out of that thing. Tasty, tasty!

Man, before I evolved, eating this much would have caused my stomach to swell up like a balloon. It's not really doing that anymore, though... where is it going, some kind of pocket dimension? It's like whatever I'm eating is disappearing. While my food stocks are diminishing, though, my red stamina meter is steadily refilling. Hmmmm. I've seen a ton of really strange phenomena since I came to this world, but I think my stomach is the strangest of them all. What the heck is up with this thing?

Well, I shouldn't put too much effort into thinking about this. “It's just that kind of world” is a good enough explanation. I'll leave explaining the rest of these phenomena to the academics.

Anyhow, even after finishing off that snake, my stomach isn't even swelling a little bit, and if it's not swollen, there's no way it's full yet. Plus, my red stamina meter isn't full yet.

Luckily, I've got this huge mound of monster corpses stacked up in my home, stacked tall enough that, before I evolved, I had no idea how I could possibly get through all of it. I should be able to get even this enormous pile inside my new pocket-dimension belly, hmm...

Well, let's dig in. I eat, and eat, and eat, I do nothing but eating. Umf, in my past life I had such a tiny appetite, but I've become a pretty serious gourmand! I could dominate the competitive eating scene like this.

Ahh, maaan, what is up with my stomach?! I have clearly shoved more food down my throat than the entire volume of my body, yet I can still eat more! It totally, seriously looks like my stomach is connected to a pocket dimension. I know I just said that I was going to leave the thinking to the academics but seriously this is my own body! I have a right to be curious! No matter how curious I am, though, it's not like I can get an answer, so maybe I'm just being impatient... Stop! No thinking! Without thinking about anything, eat in stoic silence!

I eat, and eat, and eat, and... oh? I'm out. ...Whuh? Did I seriously eat all of that food? ...I did. Nothing's left. Seriouslyyyy? I'm not even full yet! My stamina meter's not full yet either. Even after all of this food, I'm still not full? Maaan.

Please don't tell me it's going to be like this forever. Please tell me I'm only extra-hungry because I used up all of my energy evolving! I'm going to starve to death otherwise, there's no way I can find that much food. That would suck. That would reeeeally suck. Seriously, you know, that's... impossible, right? Seriously, it's impossible, right? If it's true then I just stepped on a really big evolutionary land mine.

Ahh! Now that I'm thinking about it, evolution really is a land mine, isn't it? I passed out, lost all of my energy, and was left defenseless for who knows how long. I was okay because I was in my home, but how do other monsters manage it? Man, I got really, really lucky with this one.

Even though I managed to get through evolving in one piece, running out of energy is a serious problem! Anything that didn't have piles of food stored up like I did would have to drag themselves around, with no energy, hoping to find prey. They'd totally be at a huge disadvantage in a fight, right? Maaaaan, I got lucky. Is this the bonus I get for being the main character, or was it just coincidence? Ehhh, well, it's not like they'd ever make a spider the protagonist, anyway. My life has been sufficiently awful so far that I can't really say I've been lucky overall.

There's a definite chance that this is going to happen again when I hit level ten, so I need to make sure that I'm prepared for it, starting from when I hit level nine. I happened to stumble on the perfect combination of circumstances for a flawless evolution, but if I'm not set up for it next time, then there's no chance it's going to go anywhere near as smoothly as this. Ahh, seriously, bringing down that snake was the best thing that could have happened! If I hadn't been forced to sit still and eat through its corpse, I wouldn't have made a home, and wouldn't have accidentally stockpiled all of this food. Sir Snake, I thank you, from the bottom of my heart!

Now then! While I've certainly recovered a bit, my belly is still not full. And, since I've cleaned out my larder, there's no need for me to stick around here any more. Let's anti-shut-in-ify! And so, as I set off on my aimless journey, I bid farewell to the home that has taken care of me.

Thank you, my second home! Though I may have arrived thinking that my stay would be brief, you kept me safe for as long as I needed to stay. Farewell!

I depart triumphantly. My first order of business is to fill up my stomach, which means finding prey to hunt. Once that's done... I guess I'm going back to wandering the dungeon, looking for the exit if I can.

My next evolution is probably going to require me to get bigger. My size didn't change as a result of this evolution, so the possibility is still out there that evolving will make me get way bigger all at once. I'm a little bit uneasy with how small these passages are, then. I'd really like to try to find someplace bigger, if at all possible. Really, my best option is to go outside. Worst case scenario is that I get really big while in the dungeon, only to find that the only exit is really tiny, making it impossible to leave. Yeahhhh, and I don't think I could take it if I had to live out the rest of my life here...

Yeah. Well, for now, let's find something to eat. We'll worry about what comes next once we get there.

Chapter 29. I evolved, but nothing's changed

I found my first target.

Elro Ferek — LV 5 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Another one of these frogs that I've kept running into. Its level's way higher than the other ones, though.

Hmmmm. I have no idea how my stats changed after evolving, and I'm kinda wanting to test them out. I'm betting that evolving made them stronger, though.

Though... my level did get set back down to one. Until now, whenever it went up, my stats were increased. If they got dropped back down when my level got reset, that would be seriously dangerous. Well, I don't quite think that's the case, but there are definitely games with leveling systems like that, where you get weak immediately after you evolve but then get way stronger after you recover from that. Kind of like a "New Game +" sort of thing, but if that were to happen in reality the results might be disastrous.

Yeah. I'm probably worrying about nothing, but, still, let's proceed with caution. Since I'm still a little bit concerned, I'm not going to charge in and do anything reckless. My life is on the line, after all, and discretion is the better part of valor.

I stealthily creep up the wall, take my position on the ceiling, and start to creep forward, upside-down. When I arrive just above the frog, I string one line between me and the ceiling, then use a separate thread to weave a mini-web around my forelegs. Preparations complete! I get ready to lower myself down.

Three... two... one... *GO!!*

I plunge from above, mini-web stretched out before me. Before the frog can even flinch, it's been wrapped in my web, and I cling to its back as I continue to spray more silk. When it's tied too tightly to struggle, I bite at it through my webs! CHOMP!

Hmm! Not bad, if I do say so myself. Perhaps I should start calling myself Assassin? Ehehehe. Who could possibly win against my silk and my fangs?!

Ahh, well, first off, I've got a frog to eat.

Hmm, but seriously, though. I evolved, but I'm still doing basically the same things. I originally set out with the goal of gaining some more practical combat experience, but lately I think I've not really been keeping up with that. The monsters here are way stronger than me, you know? If it's a straight up fight, my life will be on the line, you know? I'm seriously not finding any monsters of a suitable level for me to practice against. I'm getting really good at my sneak attack assassination combo, though, but I'm not always guaranteed a sneak attack. If I've built a nest, then there's no way I'll have the element of surprise against anything that tries to break through it! And wasn't the entire reason why I set out on this quest to get strong enough to defend my home?

No, no! I've evolved! My level's gone up! Even my base stats have gone up, and that alone is huge! My actions until now have not at all been for naught! Think of it like that!

Hooooohf. I nearly wrote off all of my progress as meaningless. That's bad, that's bad.

Ummmf. Still, out here in reality, relying one hundred percent on sneak attacks is actually really dangerous. When I lost my home, that was because I was relying too heavily on the power of my webs. What I need is to come up with a new weapon, any weapon! ...Hah, if I could just come up with one that easily though, life would be great...

Just off the top of my head what about my currently-unusable Corruption Magic? If I could figure out how to use this thing, a whole new world of tactics would open up to me. Of course, I don't have the manual. Grr.

If I was a human, I'd be able to learn how to use this from another human, right? Ah well, even if I wonder about that it's not like it's going to make a difference. Being forced to do everything myself is both kind of nice and a huge pain. It's nice because I don't have to subject myself to the rest of humanity, but having to tackle every problem on my own is a

ton of effort! Either way, it's not like I could get any information out of humans. I can't talk.

Hmm, I could do it if I was telepathic, couldn't I? Oh, right, haven't I been earning more skill points? If I've been getting ten points per level, by the time I hit level ten I should have saved up a hundred. It cost me a hundred points to learn Appraisal, so I should be able to pick up a new skill with what I've got now.

Hey, Ms. "Voice of Heaven"! What do you think, can I get it?

"You currently possess 200 skill points. The skill [Telepathy (LV 1)] can be acquired for 100 skill points. Would you like to acquire it now?"

Ohhhh! I can!

Hmmmm. Is telepathy even useful to me at the moment, though, with nobody around? Nah, bzzt, rejected.

Although, I have two hundred points! Maybe I've been gaining twenty points per level. Ah! That means that by the time I've hit level six, I'll be able to afford another skill! I bought Appraisal right when I started, and although it was pretty useless when I got it, I've been able to slowly grind it up into something useful. I still think I might have done something wasteful.

Hmm? Ah, wait, wait. Let's think back a little harder. Didn't I try, back when I was level six, to buy another skill, and... fail, because I didn't have enough skill points, right? Hmm?

Well, it could be that skill points are increased both by leveling up and evolving. I have no real way to determine what it really is, though! Let's put aside the problem of skill point increases for now.

Chapter 30: Let's pick up a new skill!

Well then, I've got a bunch of skill points, so I'd really like to pick up a new skill. I can't really do so carelessly, though. I picked up Appraisal on a whim and basically immediately regretted it.

While I've got my safety secured, let's spend some time thinking about this. I throw together a temporary home, ignoring the bones of the frog that I've finished eating. Man, I'm getting pretty good at putting basic homes like these together.

All right. Time to focus.

What skills shouldn't I take? Corruption Magic has taught me that I should, well, just straight-up avoid anything that has to do with magic. I have no idea how to actually use it! Really, I should steer clear of any skills that I can't figure out how to use from the name alone.

I should also really avoid buying any skills that I might earn myself. From what I've seen so far, each skill has some sort of skill proficiency associated with it. When I've accumulated enough proficiency in the skill, the level of the skill goes up. Even if I don't have a single level in the skill, though, it looks like proficiency still accumulates, and when I finally get enough proficiency, I get the skill. Granted, the only skills I've acquired this way were resistances, so maybe that sort of thing is unique to resistance skills. Still, if there's a chance that I might be able to learn it by myself, I shouldn't be spending any skill points on it.

When I look at it that way, maybe spending skill points on Appraisal wasn't actually a terrible idea. How could I have possibly worked to acquire Appraisal if I were starting from scratch? It's also ridiculously fortunate that I figured out how to use Appraisal immediately, unlike magic. Man, I've been complaining about how worthless and unusable this skill is, but this might be one of the rare few skills that are actually usable out of the box.

Okay, so, if I pick a skill, it not only has to be a skill that I can figure out how to use, but also needs to be one that I wouldn't pick up on my own. That's actually a pretty harsh restriction, you know! Seriously, all I have to go on is a skill's name, with no clue about what it actually does, which is, quite frankly, terrifying. On top of that, I have to keep checking with the, uh, "Voice of Heaven" to see if there's even a skill that matches the name I'm looking for.

From what I've seen so far, if I want to spend skill points to acquire a skill, I need to tell the "Voice of Heaven" that I'd like to purchase it. If I ask her about a skill that exists, she responds; if it doesn't exist, though, she remains silent. So, in order to find out what skills exist, I've been constantly spamming the "Voice of Heaven" with requests.

Since I've been sending enquiries whenever I've got any downtime, I've started to put together a list of skills that I might want to pick up. Of those skills, there's five that meet my criteria: Poison Claw, Thread Manipulation, Automatic HP Recovery, SP Cost Reduction, and Detection.

Poison Claw and Thread Manipulation are skills that will, hopefully, make me stronger. Poison Claw is, well, Poison Fang, but in claw form, and Thread Manipulation is a support skill to help me use my threads more effectively. There's a couple of problems, though: if I pick up Poison Claw, it's probably going to be way weaker than Poison Fang at the beginning, and I'm not one hundred percent certain that I'll be able to figure out how to use Thread Manipulation.

Automatic HP Recovery and SP Cost Reduction are totally background support skills. If they work just like their names imply, they're going to be extremely handy to have around.

Last but not least is the riskiest choice: Detection. In this dungeon, I have a serious need for a way to detect surprise attacks. I think Detection is the right skill for the job, but I'm not really sure what its effect will be... or, again, how to even use it. If I pick this skill, it's a serious gamble.

I've found plenty of other skills, but this is the lineup that I'm really interested in. My life is on the line here, so I can't really afford to be too sentimental here. There's definitely

other skills that I wanted, but didn't have enough skill points to obtain. Like, you know, Immortality. I'm probably off by an entire order of magnitude, on that one.

Hmmmm. I'm torn. I mean, with these skills, I'm not really working to come up with any new strategies, I'm just figuring out how to strengthen my existing ones. Well, this is really what I'm reduced to if I'm trying to avoid picking up any more awful skills. For now, I guess I should pull HP Recovery from the list. If my HP hits zero, I'm probably going to die, right? If I'm an assassin, I should be avoiding any sort of situation where my HP could go down to begin with.

Four more to pick from, hmm... what should I doooo? I mean, there's SP Cost Reduction, which doesn't really have any downsides I can think of. It's my safest choice. Picking up Poison Claw would probably let me broaden my combat tactics, but getting its level up to a usable point is going to be super slow! If I can figure out how to use Thread Manipulation, it'll be a serious boost to my combat ability... but, of course, if I can't figure it out, then it's yet another useless skill I'm hobbled with. Detection, as I mentioned earlier, is a gamble.

Mmmmmmm.

Umf. Alright, I've decided.

“You currently possess 200 skill points. The skill [Thread Manipulation (LV 1)] can be acquired for 100 skill points. Would you like to acquire it now?”

Yes.

“You have acquired the skill [Thread Manipulation (LV 1)]. You have 100 skill points remaining. The skill [Detection (LV 1)] can be acquired for 100 skill points. Would you like to acquire it now?”

Yes!

“You have acquired the skill [Detection (LV 1)]. You have 0 skill points remaining.”

I've picked up Thread Manipulation and Detection. I know I was just saying things about putting my life on the line, but I've seriously just picked up the two biggest gambles from my list. Ahahaaaa... I'm really not cut out for gambling. Well, it's not like there's any going back now. I've picked up these two skills, and if I can't use them, I'll cry.

...I don't know if spiders can cry, though.

Side Story 3: Fantasy

Spread across my lap is a picture book. In it are amazingly realistic pictures of strange and fantastic creatures, the likes of which were never seen on Earth. It seems that, in this world, monsters are real.

“This is a goblin! Goblins are monsters that have green skin, and they’re about as large as a human child. They look kind of like a human, but they’re not very smart at all. They don’t have very many skills, and their stats are very low. You shouldn’t take them lightly, though! When it levels up and learns a few skills, one can pick up a weapon and be quite dangerous if you don’t expect it.”

Anna, my nanny, is sitting next to me, describing the monsters in the book out loud for me. Anna looks like she’s in her twenties, but in reality she’s nearly twice that age. Apparently, she used to be a magician who fought against the monsters, and now she’s explaining to me the things that the picture book leaves out.

On my other side, my little sister Sue is imitating me by staring at the book. Recently, she’s taken to copying me a lot. Unlike me, though, she can’t yet speak very well, and I don’t think she can understand Anna’s words very well. I’m paying very close attention to what Anna is saying, though. One of us should, at least.

I pat my adorable sister on the head, ruffling her light-blue hair. It feels smooth to the touch. Sue looks quite pleased, and lets out a happy giggle.

Anna and Clevea, our other servant who’s standing by the door, look at us smilingly. I used to think that the attention was a little bit embarrassing, but I’m pretty used to it by now.

“My prince, you and the princess seem quite close,” says Anna. “Yeh!” exclaims Sue. “Yes!” I say, almost simultaneously. Anna’s smile grows broader. It looks like I’m getting pretty good at playing the part of an adorable toddler.

I go back to looking at the picture book. Anna doesn't know it yet, but I've already learned to read this country's language, so I've been reading the descriptions of each monster while pretending to enjoy looking at the pictures. This really is a picture book, though, so the illustrations fill each page with only a small amount of space left over for a short description. I'm glad that Anna is explaining things more clearly.

The more I listen to Anna talk, though, the more I realize how fucking crazy this world is. These people are seriously talking, with a straight face, about skills, stats, and levels. These are video game terms!

This world seems to be very much like a game. Well, I'm living in it, so I don't really think of it as a game itself, but that doesn't change the fact that it's full of all of these game-like systems.

Skills seem to be pre-defined abilities, drawn out of your soul once you've had enough practice. Stats are discrete measures of our raw abilities. Levels seem to be a numerical representation of the power you amass as you go through life.

This was all explained to me, but from a gamer's perspective, these are some extremely flimsy explanations. Everyone seems to take them at face value, not even bothering to ask why things are this way. I'm really not comfortable with this, but I don't have much of a choice but to play along.

I turn the page on my book, revealing a picture of an enormous wolf. To show how large it is, there's a person lying at its feet. I thought for a moment that the scale had been exaggerated, but Anna's explanation proved otherwise.

"This is called a Fenrir. It's a Mythic-ranked monster, said to be as large as a mountain and capable of destroying a fortress with one bite. I'm lucky to have never seen one myself."

This certainly seems to be true. This giant wolf is far too big to be called a monster, though. It's a kaiju¹. How can the world be this unbelievable, allowing such an enormous creature to exist? How does it keep up its enormous bulk?

“Umm, how does this stand up?” I ask. Anna stares at me blankly. Perhaps I need to clarify. “It’s so big, isn’t it heavy?”

Comprehension flashes across Anna’s face. “Ah,” she says, “it might be better for me to show you than to tell you. Clevea?”

Clevea comes closer. Like Anna, Clevea used to serve this country as a knight, and is now working as both a nanny and a bodyguard. Unlike Anna the magician, whose frame is very slender, Clevea has a powerful, almost masculine body that she built through years of training.

Anna and Clevea quietly discuss something, then take up positions a few paces from each other. Clevea extends an open hand out towards Anna.

“Here it comes. *Fireball*,” chants Anna, casting a spell at Clevea.

Fireball is a low rank fire spell that, exactly as its name implies, creates a small ball of fire and launches it at your opponent. The flaming sphere, which was cast with low power, streaks forward and hits Clevea in her outstretched hand. Sue stiffens in surprise. I was a little surprised as well, suddenly seeing magic for the first time.

Anna and Clevea exchange smirks over our reaction, like they’d just pulled off a successful prank. I feel a little offended.

“Your hand... hurt?” asks Sue, looking at Clevea’s hand.

“Only a little bit, Princess. It was very hot for a moment, but it’s fine now!” says Clevea, in a powerful voice that’s unusually deep for a woman. “As you have just seen, if your stats are high, you can become quite strong. That’s how such large monsters can move without being crushed by their own weight.”

I’m curious, so I reach out to feel the palm of Clevea’s hand. Her hands are tough and calloused, as expected of someone who fights with a sword. But it’s still ordinary skin. It’s

nowhere near tough enough to be able to take a fireball head-on without even getting singed.

“My prince, when you raise your defensive attributes, your skin does not necessarily become tough,” says Clevea. “Really?” I ask. “Yes, my prince. High defense does not make your body physically tougher, it makes you harder to injure. While I’m nowhere near this powerful myself, I’ve heard that the Heroes of previous generations could withstand direct sword blows without taking a scratch,” says Clevea, answering my question politely.

However, to become hard to hurt like that, wouldn’t the intercellular binding forces have to be somehow increased? Well, in this fantastical world, trying to reconcile things I see with my knowledge from Earth is a waste of my time. For now, I’ll set aside these troubled thoughts.

Translator’s notes for this chapter:

1. I’m leaving this as “kaiju” because I feel like the word (meaning giant monster, like Godzilla) has been sufficiently exposed to Western audiences through pop culture, like Pacific Rim, and Shun does not strike me as the kind of guy who would namedrop Godzilla. If there’s a better English word that I’m blanking on, please let me know in the comments!

Chapter 31: I've picked up new... skills.....

Hoooof. Right! Let's test out these new skills.

First up is Thread Manipulation. Based on its name, it should be a skill that makes my spider silk much more useful. My already-unstoppable webs are going to become even more powerful! This is the best. Let's start by spinning some silk.

The next step is the problem. If I can't figure out how to actually manipulate my threads, picking up this skill was pretty worthless. I'm really, really hoping that this isn't the same thing as what happened with Appraisal.

Move... mooooove...! Wait, my threads feel a little funny. ...Hm? What the heck? There's a weird feeling that's kind of hard to put into words... almost like there's something... in... my threads? It almost feels like there's nerves in my threads, like they're... alive? I focus on whatever is in my threads, and will it to move.

Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle.

With a wiggly sound that I'm pretty sure is all in my head, my threads start to sluggishly move a little.

Yep! I made it move. I don't really have the kind of control I need to use it in combat, though...

Ugghhhh, okay, fine! I knew this was going to happen! I was aware of this possibility! I'm happy I got it to move at all! I had no hopes, no expectations for anything better!

Haaaaah. Hm? My mana went down a bit? I've never seen that happen before, is this from using Thread Manipulation? Ahhhh, Thread Manipulation consumes mana, hmm... Well, I haven't been using mana at all until now so this is fine. I should work on leveling this when I can, since I'll have mana to spare. I'm choosing to believe that this is going to be useful in the long-term.

I take a moment to compose myself, and turn to the next thing: Detection. Okay! I have zero expectations. This was an even bigger gamble than Thread Manipulation was. I have no idea if I can even use it! To be perfectly honest, I don't even know if it has the enemy-detecting functionality that I'm hoping for. I can't even rule out the possibility that you're a completely unrelated skill, Detection! On top of that, it's level one, so I should be prepared for something as worthless as Thread Manipulation or even how Appraisal was when I first got it. If I can figure out what it does and how to use it, that's already cause for celebration.

Well, let's try it like I do with Appraisal: clear my mind, concentrate, and think, "Detect." Ah! I'd kind of had a sort of image in my head that it would be like meditating, and it looks like I was pretty close: through senses that were previously dark, I can suddenly see so many things...

W... wait, what?

Each little wisp of information is so insubstantial that I have no idea what it could mean. And... there's so much of it! My brain is drowning under a deluge of information from all sides!

Erk!!

Just like when I overused Appraisal, the violent wave of information crashes into me like a punch to the head. I frantically cut Detection off immediately.

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Detection (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2."

What? Wasn't that too fast? Did you seriously just level up?! I mean, that certainly was a ton of information, but, uh, seriously?

Aha, ha, no, wait. First off, what the hell was that?! Whatever that was is completely and utterly unlike what I was thinking of when I asked for detection! I want to scream! Get me

the manager! Hey! “Voice of Heaven”! I demand an explanation! This is completely! Utterly! Inconceivably unacceptable!!

Ughhhh. Settle down, me... ...Okay. Let's just double-check to make sure that was, in fact, the result of Detection. This might be a little risky, so I should make sure I'm prepared. Inhale... Exhale. Right! Commence Detection.

Just like before, I'm assaulted by a wave of unintelligible information.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Detection (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

I said... that's too... fast! Errgk, that's enough. I cut it off again. Blahhhh. Ugh, I'm exhausted already.

I've learned one thing, though. Yeah. “Detection”. The skill's name is just “Detection”. There's nothing that says *what it actually detects!* It does exactly what I thought it does, but way better than I thought could possibly happen! In fact, it works so well that I can't use it at all!

I think this skill gathers information about literally everything around me, and blasts it at me full-force.

That quantity of information just immediately overwhelms my brain's ability to process it. It is extremely likely that it's got enough information in there to let me detect enemies sneaking up on me, somewhere in that enormous flood, but the information is coming at me far too fast for my tiny brain to pick up on it. For that, I'd need more processing power than a supercomputer.

Maaaaan, seriously! I had not even begun to consider the possibility that there could be a skill that was too powerful for me to use. What a trap I just fell into. Seriously, who thought this one up? Do you get off on leaving traps for your players?

Ahhh. Well, I can't use Detection. I can practice willing my threads to get Thread Manipulation's level up... but if I do that with Detection, won't my head explode? I guess I've got no choice but to shut this away forever. No waaaaay.

Hey, can I get a refund on skills? ...Yeah, not a chance. Uuuugh, I seriously have no luck at gambling. What have I done? This sucks.

Dejectedly, I slump.

Chapter 32: Growth spurt

Sneaking, sneeeking...

Fwap!

Roooolling, roooolling...

CHOMP!

Time to eat!

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 1 to level 2. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Diiiiing. I’m a bit upset I didn’t get any skills, but that’s really alright. Oh, more prey.

Sneeeeeaking, sneeeeeeking...

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Stealth (LV 1)].”

Fwap!

Roooolling, roooolling...

CHOMP!

Time to eat.

Hm? Something happened during all that? Oh yeah, the “Voice of Heaven” (heh) said something. Hmm... a skill, right? Stealth, right? That’ll make it harder for enemies to

notice me, hmm? It's not like anyone's been noticing me anyway, so, I don't really need this... Well, it's not like I'm going to refuse it if they're going to give it to me anyway.

Oh, more prey.

Sneeeeeaking, sneeeeeeking...

Fwap!

Roooolling, roooolling...

CHOMP!

“You have earned the title [Assassin], and have been awarded the skills [Stealth (LV 1)] and [Shadow Magic (LV 1)]. Your new skill, [Stealth (LV 1)], has been integrated with your existing skill, [Stealth (LV 1)].”

Eatin' time.

Oh? I heard something again. A title? This is the first title I've gotten since I picked up Filth Eater and Kin Eater way back when, huh... I tried a bunch of different things to get some titles a while ago, but nothing worked. Assassin, huuuuh... I'm seriously turning into a ninja, here.

Whoa, even more prey.

Sneeeeeaking, sneeeeeeking...

Fwap!

Roooolling, roooolling...

CHOMP!

“You have earned the title [Monster Slayer], and have been awarded the skills [Strength (LV 1)] and [Toughness (LV 1)].”

Time to eat.

Oh? Yet another announcement, huh. Monster Slayer? Maaaan, but basically all of my time in this dungeon has been spent killing monsters! Why now? Hmm, maybe... maybe this is a title earned for crushing countless monsters. Yeaaaah...

Wha?! Another prey!

Sneaking, sneeaking...

Fwap!

Roooolling, roooolling...

CHOMP!

Time to eat...

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Overeating (LV 1)].”

Seriously, again? This is a great day for gains. But, seriously, “Overeating”. I mean, what kind of name for a skill is that? That sure sounds pretty negative, doesn’t it?

Man, but have I been eating or what? My stomach had completely emptied itself after I evolved, but it’s finally starting to swell back up again. Maybe that mysterious food-vanishing stomach was a one-time thing, from right after I evolved. Phewwww. If I’d had to keep filling up my pocket-dimension stomach forever, I’d hit a really bad point on my Engel curve... although, I don’t have any money, so I’m not sure if I even fall on an Engel curve to begin with.¹ I’m broooooke.

...Wait up a bit, hm? I was a bit hungry, so I was just kind of gliding along wherever, but... today's been really good for whatevering my whatevers? I whateverly whatevered my whatevers, so whatever, you know.

Yeah. Let's calm down first, shall we.

My level went up. This is good! This happens a bunch when I hunt, so this isn't really surprising.

Next is my Stealth skill. That's also good! I can't really say it's useful, right now, but it's better than nothing, so I will take it if I can get it.

I got some titles, too! That was a little strange, right? Well, getting titles is good, right? It's seriously great, right? Getting two of them in a row is seriously... well, you know, right?

Let me see... "Assassin" and "Monster Slayer". What dangerous-sounding titles! Ugh, none of my titles are respectable at all. Even after all this time...

So, Assassin is a pretty ninjaesque title. It got me Stealth and Shadow Magic, so of course it's got that kind of feel. With Shadow Magic, can I literally dive into the shadows? If I can strike from the shadows themselves, this will become a seriously useful skill. Of course, y'all are aware I can't use a lick of magic, right? Tell me the gosh-darned instructions, already! Ugggh. The manual, please...

I understand even less about Monster Hunter. What's this? Strength? Toughness? I have no idea what these ridiculously vague skills are supposed to do. Hmmmm? Well, if I take these skills exactly at face value, then might these be just straight-up stat bonuses to offense and defense? Maybe it's a support skill that can boost them temporarily? Well, if it's permanent, it would be way better; I have no idea how I'd activate it if it were temporary. Well, either way, I should leave them alone for now.

But then what's with this Overeating skill I got at the end? This seriously has a negative effect, doesn't it? Don't even joke about things like that to a girl, "Voice of Heaven"! I'll beat you up! You callin' me fat?! Wrong! Absolutely wrong!! I just ate a little while ago, that's

all this is! I'll be back to my slender self again overnight! Check out this leg, this long and slender leg! A beautiful leg, so thin that it might break at any moment! No human can possibly match the slenderness of my stick-like legs! So who're you callin' fat?! If I hadn't just eaten, you'd be callin' me thin!

Haaah... haaaaaaaaah. Man, that was pointless. Nobody ever called me fat in my previous life, so I might have overreacted a little just now. No, people tended to call me skinny or even bony before.

Well, although, today was a pretty spectacular day for progress, wasn't it? This was the first time I've gotten so much stuff all at once. It would be great if I could keep up this pace for eeeeever. Hm? Optimistic? Me? Yyyyyep!

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *Engel's Law observes that, as income rises, the total percentage of income spent on food falls, even if actual expenditure rises. I'm not entirely sure why she's bringing this up, but Kumoko certainly is spending a large percentage of her time hunting.*

Chapter 33: The true face of Ms. Appraisal

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”

Oh hey there, Appraisal! This is great! I’m pretty sure that level ten is the max level, so right about now is about when you should start getting a little bit more useful, probably! With my heart pounding, I look up at my own Appraisal results.

Small Taratekt – LV 2 – (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 36/36 (green)

MP: 36/36 (blue)

SP: 36/36 (yellow), 34/36 (red)

Avg. Offense: 19

Avg. Defense: 19

Avg. Magic Power: 18

Avg. Resistance: 18

Avg. Speed: 348

What... did... you... say...?!

What? Whaat?!? Whaaaaaat?!?! Who the hell are you, and what have you done with the real Ms. Appraisal? The Appraisal I know is a disagreeable little brat that never fails to disappoint me! She’s certainly not a cool, competent beauty with a can-do attitude like you!! Where have you taken the real Appraisal?! I had a speech lined up and everything! “Ugh, useless...” That’s what I was going to say! Time after time after time I got my hopes up whenever you leveled up, “oh, maybe there will be some new little bit of functionality that will make this useful！”, but no, every single time, “ugh, useless...” and so on! Why do you tear apart my expectations every! Single! Time!! Tell me why! Tell me why!!!

Hhah! Hhahh! Haaahhhhh! I... haahhh... got carried away for a bit there, heh. Time to take a deep breath and calm the heck down. Inhale, inhale... exhaaaaaale. Yay, I'm back to my usual self again!!

Aaaaaaaaaahh. It's like Appraisal evolved, or something. This level gave me way more stuff than any previous level did. Seriously, this is one of the things I was hoping I could get out of Appraisal from the beginning! What's with this sudden change? It's like, I don't know, a loser like me suddenly getting super hot in high school and becoming super popular. Ah, that's a roundabout one, even for me.

In any event, this Appraisal enhancement is awesome. My previously-unknown strengths have been spelled out quite plainly. Plus, since so many of these things have been broken down for me, I've got some concrete things I can Appraise now.

Now, just to make sure I'm not missing anything, I'll double-Appraise all of the vocab words.

Small Taratekt: *A hatchling of the spider-like monster species known as the Taratekt. It is carnivorous, and its fangs drip with poison.*

Avg. Offense: *A measure of an individual's average physical offensive power. As this is an average, the power of each specific body part may be different.*

Avg. Defense: *A measure of an individual's average physical defensive ability. As this is an average, the defense of each specific body part may be different.*

Avg. Magic Power: *A measure of the average effectiveness of an individual's magic. As this is an average, the power of a specific type of magic may be different.*

Avg. Resistance: *A measure of an individual's average magical defensive ability. As this is an average, the defense may be different depending on the context.*

Avg. Speed: *A measure of an individual's average aptitude for speed. As this is an average, the quickness of each specific body part may be different.*

Wooow, this is amazing. These explanation texts are getting pretty long, huuuh. Ms. Appraisal, becoming this awesome, huh...

Umf. When it says “each specific body part may be different”, it’s probably talking about something like how a human’s hands and feet are different. Their offensive abilities are different, for instance. If my guess is right, then this stat basically lumps everything together and gives the average of that.

But, uh... why are my stats so low? I don’t really have anything to compare it to, so I don’t quite know just how low they actually are, but I did, briefly, hit level ten; even after evolving, my stats are like this. Lumped in there, though, is my speed stat, which is glowing a strange color. This is weird, right? It’s over ten times the value of the rest of my stats. I am seriously Speed-speced.

Ummmf. Well, now that I’ve got this, I really want to measure myself up against other monsters. Extrapolating from my previous results, it’s pretty likely that checking another monster’s stats will end in failure. I say “likely”, but, really, I have never actually succeeded in getting anything more than my opponent’s level. I’m pretty sure this is still going to be the case, even after my Appraisal level went up, but it never hurts to try...

So, let’s go look for some prey. Where, oh where, might I find something good...

...Aha, there! Alright then: Appraise!

Elro Greim – LV 2 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Ah, yep, appraising another monster’s stats is still difficult, huuuuh. Oh well.

Well, it’s the first time I’ve seen one of these things before, so I’ll look up its species.

Elro Greim: *A mouse-like monster species that is native to the Great Elro Labyrinth. It is omnivorous, and its bite is poisonous.*

Hm? Wait up. There was a vocabulary word in that description that I can't just ignore.

Great Elro Labyrinth: *The world's largest labyrinth, it contains the underground passages that tie together Daztordia and Kasanagara continents.*

Well, this was unexpected, but now I know where I am. It seems this dungeon is called the Great Elro Labyrinth. Yeah, I'd noticed that a lot of these monsters were named Elro something-or-others, but to think that's this dungeon's name. World's largest labyrinth, though? No wonder it's so huge. The underground ties between two continents, though? Is this place under the ocean? Whoaa, no waaaay. That's huge! Uh, am I even capable of escaping from a dungeon this big? Aaaah, I'm not going to think about this.

I check out the other two names I picked up.

Daztordia: *The peaceful continent of the tribes of Man. Contains many different human nations.*

Kasanagara: *The continent at the center of the world. Has the largest surface area of all the continents.*

Hmmmmmm, okay. I don't really have anything else to say, here. I mean, if I can get out of here I guess I might want to try to avoid the human-populated Daztordia, but it's not like I have any way to pick.

Well, I managed to figure out more things about my current situation, and I did indeed pick up some useful trivia.

Chapter 34: Growth Spurt: The Sequel

Well, let's leave Appraisal alone for now and take care of this mouse-thing.

Sneaking, sneeaking...

Fwap!

Roooolling, roooolling...

CHOMP!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Fang (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

Ooh! My combo's still going! Magnificent. I've been thinking about my awful stats, now that I know them for sure, and I've realized that I've basically got no offensive capabilities whatsoever aside from Poison Fang. It is the first, last, and only weapon in my arsenal, so its level is extremely important.

Hmm, let's call it quits for today. My red total-stamina meter still has a bit of a surplus, and doing useless things is the height of sin.

I put together a new simple home on the spot. Now, since I'm safe, let's dig in... nah. As you'd expect, after eating all of that stuff earlier, I'm not really all that hungry. I mean, it's not like I'm so full I can't eat another bite, but instead of forcing myself to eat it now I think I'd much rather save it until after I wake up.

I say that, but it's not like I'm going to go straight to bed. I've got a thing I'd like to do first...

Wiggle, slither, stretch...

...Uh, what's with that look? I'm not doing anything obscene back here. I'm just practicing Thread Manipulation. I've figured out so far that I can control just one thread at a time. If I want to move it, I need to make it inch along like an earthworm, and it's very slow going. As long as it's still attached to my body, though, the range is pretty large. On the plus side, it barely costs me any mana to keep going. That's all I've got so far.

Really, a weapon of this poor quality can't be used in combat at all. So, before I go to sleep, I'm going to burn through all of my mana practicing with it, so that I can get its level up. Once I get its level up, this poor-quality skill should start getting considerably better. If Appraisal could shape herself up into a can-do kind of girl, I'm sure that Thread Manipulation will also start being useful at about level six. The road to usefulness might be a long one, though.

Once I can get its level up, there's a billion things I want to try out. Silk armor might not be out of the question anymore, and I might be able to come up with a new way to attack. I also want to try out that enemy-detecting thread idea I had from a while ago! Ahh, I can only dream.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Thread Manipulation (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

Ahaha right when I said it you did it!! Level uppp!!

Wiggly wiggle, sliiiiither, stretchy stretch.

Oh ho! These movements aren't bad at all! Truly outrageous, how the level went up and it immediately started moving faster. It's still not yet ready for combat use, but if it gets this much better every time it levels, I might be able to put it into action sooner than expected!

Well, I've still got plenty of mana, so let's keep plugging away at this skill proficiency...

Yaaaawn! Ah, I slept great! In the end, I stuck with it until my mana was nearly exhausted, and got Thread Manipulation up to level three. I had originally been planning on completely exhausting all of my mana, but once it got pretty low, I got cold feet. I don't know exactly what might go wrong, but I had this kind of instinctive reaction that running completely out would be dangerous, so I cut it off at the last minute.

One night's rest completely recovered my mana! Yeah. Grinding out Thread Manipulation before I go to bed won't be a problem at all, in the future.

No, wait a sec. If I gain it back that quickly, shouldn't I spend it all right when I wake up as well? I don't use any mana at all, normally, so if it recovers naturally over time then it will refill itself while I'm out hunting. Yeah, this is way more efficient. If it turns out that there's some unforeseen problem with doing things this way, then tomorrow I'll just stick to practicing right before I go to sleep. Well, I'll never find out if I don't try!

So, I went back to practicing Thread Manipulation, and right before my mana was about to run out...

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Thread Manipulation (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

...said the “Voice of Heaven”.

Yessss. Good, good. My mana's nearly completely gone, so I can't really test to see how much better it's moving, but since it's level four, it's probably getting pretty good. It's probably not good enough to use in combat, but I should try making myself some armor in the safety of my own home. Tonight's going to be awesome!

Now, let us have some breakfast. The main course for today is yesterday's mouse. Time to eat.

Umf, not good. Eating didn't refill any of my mana, so looks like I won't be able to recover by eating any old thing. There's most likely some sort of equivalent to a mana potion, so there's probably ingredients that will recover your mana if you just eat them raw. I'd bet

that the flesh of a strongly-magical monster would work great for recovery! Of course, I haven't seen any magic-wielding magical monsters at all, yet.

Man, after evolving, I've really hit a groove. My skills are steadily leveling up, I got a couple new titles... looks like it's the year of the spider! It's like the whole world is telling me it's my time to shine. Heheheh. Just try and stop me! Heheheee! I'm going to take this groove and ride it all the way through this dungeon. Sure, I know it's freaking enormous, but there's nothing left to do but keep an eye out for the exit. Now then, world, brace yourself, for today I shine!

Hee hee heeee.

Chapter 35: That's why I said not to get too full of yours—

Ooh hoo hoo hoo. With high spirits, I search the dungeon. Maaan, when I've hit a groove like this, I don't think I can really call any of the monsters around here "opponents". As long as I spot my target before they spot me, I can always finish it with an easy sneak attack. Even if I can't, isn't it possible that, after all this time, I might be able to win in a proper head-to-head fight? I'm pretty sure I got way stronger when I evolved, and my skill levels have climbed up to match. There's no way I'd put on such a pathetic show as when I was fighting that frog way back when. I can't say that I'm guaranteed to win, so I'm the tiniest bit uncertain, but I'm positive I can make it happen.

All this is thanks to the crazy level-up combo I've been carrying since I evolved: my skill levels went up a ton, and I got a bunch of new titles! Aside from my bit of bad luck with respect to Detection, everything recently has been nothing but positive.

Hmm, now that I think about it, this run of good luck started even before I evolved... it was when I defeated that snake, right? My level went up immediately after killing it. Its huge corpse let me stock up a huge pile of food too, which was good, since that let me evolve safely without starving afterwards. My combo just kept on going after that. Oh, yeah. It must have all started with that snake. It was a right pleasure meetin' ya, Mister Snake, thank ya, thank ya.

Oh, the path splits. Left or right, huh? Well, I'll stick to my usual plan and stay to the right as I always do... hm? Somehow, I've got a terrible feeling, the kind of feeling that makes me want to get as far away from here as possible.

I glance over to the left entrance.

Elro Baldarad – LV 5 – *failed to appraise statistics*

Oh, nooo. It's Mister Snaaaake.

Argh, am I an idiot? Sure, this snake is a lower level than the one I killed earlier, but this time I don't have a web set up that it can get stuck in. Uh oh, and it's noticed me! And it looks like it's locked on!!

I flee! I run straight away down the right passageway! Like I could do anything to that kind of monster! Who's the idiot that was just saying there were no real opponents anymore? Me!! No no no no no! It's extremely clear that this thing is on an entirely different level from the other monsters! It's a boss monster! Why are you spawning here like any old normal-type monsters? Are you stupid?!

Aaaa, AAAA! What's this terrifying noise chasing behind me? It's too fast! Holy crap, it can keep up with my speed?! It's 348! I thought I had every other monster beat in the speed department! How is it you're keeping up with me!!

Grk! More monsters, dead ahead?!

Elro Baldarad – LV 5 – failed to appraise statistics

Elro Randanel – LV 4 – failed to appraise statistics

Elro Randanel – LV 4 – failed to appraise statistics

Whaaaaat?! Really? A pack of three, right now?! If it was one of them I could just dodge around it as I ran past but all three of them have me blocked off completely!

Wh... what should I do?! What should I dooo?! Aaaaah, I'm running out of time!

OKAY! It's do or die! I'm going to stay at full speed, and run along the walls! WhoooOOOAAAAAAA! Hah! I did it! I did it! Wall run: successful!

Eat my dust, three-pack! There's a terrible noise behind me but there's no way I'm going to turn around to check! I have no idea how long those three can hold out, but now's the time for fleeing, not thinking! Sorry, you three! Survival of the fittest, you know; sacrifice yourselves for me!

Aahhaha! I'm going to survive, thanks to those noble sacrifices! Rest in p... hm? Where's the... path...?

W, w, w, wait, no, this, like back with the centipedes?! AaaaAAA! This is bad, this is bad! I'm going too fast, I can't stop, ah, aahhh, n, no, aaaaAAA!

I dive forward to find nothing below me but empty air.

Eh? Ahhh, this is quite an enormous hole. If I were to, perchance, fall straight down it, I would surely perish.

I'm faaalliiiiing!! Nooooo!! Don't joke about bungee jumping without a cord! A cord? A CORD!! Spider silk might save me! I shoot a line at the wall, and it sticks! And, like this...!!

Whoof!

Aaah, that... really hurts. Sure, I stopped my fall, but the whiplash slammed me into the wall at maximum speed. Aaaaah... I thought I was going to die.

I got chased by a giant snake, then when running away flung myself off of a giant cliff. This is what I get for getting too full of myself. I understand now. I shall reflect on this. ...Now that I'm reflecting, I wonder what that buzzing noise I've been hearing for a while is...?

Finjegoat — LV 4 — (failed to appraise statistics)

Finjegoat — LV 3 — (failed to appraise statistics)

Finjegoat — LV 5 — (failed to appraise statistics)

Finjegoat — LV 4 — (failed to appraise statistics)

Ahh, it was wasps. Giant wasp monsters, of a species I've only seen once before. Countless wasps, buzzing past each other in this shaft.

Umm... hello? I'm sorry! Please don't get mad! Seriously, please don't look over this way!!

If they all swoop on me, I've got basically only one option, if I want to dodge it!

Yeah! Another dive! This time, it's going to be different. I've got a thread connecting me to the wall already, so I could make it stretchy and bungee jump off of it. After two or three bounces, I can stick another cord to the wall... and another bungee! Doing all this, I make it to the bottom of this shaft fairly easily.

Alright, back on solid ground again! The sky above me is swarming with wasps. I force my worn-out body to move, running as far away as I can.

Side Story 4: Magic

I focus my will, feeling the mana that fills my body. By practicing this technique, I was able to gain the “Mana Perception” skill. Thanks to my continued study, I’ve been able to feel the circulation of mana as it flows within me, almost like the rushing of my blood. With my “Mana Manipulation” skill, I increase the rate of circulation. Steadily, the mana begins to move faster and faster. I concentrate a part of it in my palm. I focus on amplifying the rotation of the mana in my hand more and more, until enough energy accumulates that it transmutes itself into a high-energy form. To complete it, all I need to do is shape it into “magic”.

However, I won’t do it; or, rather, I can’t do it. I slowly return the accumulated mana to the rest of my body, and let it slow to its natural state.

When the mana inside me has calmed, I open the eyes that I had squeezed shut in concentration. Before me, I see Anna, looking at me nervously. Standing next to her is Clevea, but it doesn’t look like she’s noticed anything strange.

“This is dreadful,” says Anna. “Don’t you mean amazing?” asks Clevea. “‘Amazing’ doesn’t even begin to scratch the surface of this. Looking at their raw practical skills alone, the princess is already as skilled as any beginning mage, and his Highness’s skills are surely intermediate-level! Both of their mana capacities exceed what mine were at that age.”

They may be whispering, but many months of straining my ears to try to learn the language of this world gave me the “Enhanced Hearing” skill, so I can hear it just fine.

“That’s what you’d call genius, right?” asks Clevea. Anna nods, gravely.

Genius, huh. I’m really not a genius at all. Granted, I was born with an above-average mana capacity, but it’s really thanks to my consciousness from my previous life. Thanks to that, I’ve been able to practice ever since I was born.

I may be a very young child on the outside, but I've got the mind of a high school student. The life of a baby is extremely simple, so I wound up with a lot of free time on my hands. Whenever I started to get bored, I worked on training my magic. Anna, ever the excellent teacher, had given a thorough explanation at one point. It was far too difficult for a child to understand, but a high school student like me had no trouble at all.

Thanks to that, I earned the skills Mana Perception and Mana Manipulation very quickly, and by now I've leveled them each up to level five. This is the results of my constant diligence.

Ordinarily it would take a person a very long time to accrue this much skill. I, however, am a baby, and since having magic has always been a dream of mine, I was able to devote all of my free time to practice. Now, I possess a magical talent that far surpasses any other child my age.

Say what you will about me, though, the true genius here is my little sister Sue.

I look over at Sue, sitting next to me. Just by copying what I was doing, Sue figured out how to manipulate magic just like I did. Compared to me, her manipulation is weak and her circulation is slow, but even still, she can move and mold mana quite well.

Manipulating mana is no easy task. Until I acquired the skill, it was practically impossible. To start with, I come from a world where magic does not exist! I had to suppress all of my instincts that were telling me that magic wasn't real.

I hear that, in general, magical talent manifests itself only as early as five years old. (By the way, a year here is 411 days.) Nobody's ever heard of people able to manipulate magic since birth, apart from me and Sue.

I'm a reincarnated soul who kept the memories and faculties of an adult, which let me practice as much as I wanted. Sue, however, is different. Sue was merely mimicking me. Just from that, just from watching me and following along, she achieved an unheard-of level of control over her magic. Now that is something worthy of calling genius.

To be perfectly honest, I've been uneasy about the future ever since I was born. With Sue's raw natural talent, it's obvious that she's destined to become someone great. I, however, was a perfectly ordinary high school student in my former life, with no special talents to speak of. I may have a lead now thanks to being reincarnated, but once Sue really starts to sprint, she's going to catch up and even overtake me immediately, and my pride as an older brother... no. That's not yet set in stone, and it's still a long ways away. I'm going to do all that I can to keep blazing ahead to widen my lead by as much as I can.

"Umm, why is doin' magic bad?" I say.

Anna has prohibited me from doing magic. All she's letting me do is practice Mana Manipulation. Apparently, if you're good at manipulation, when you acquire a magic skill for a given elemental attribute you can start doing real magic immediately. Knowing that doesn't do me any good, though, since I don't have any attribute skills and have no idea how to acquire them.

"My prince," says Anna, "there are several reasons, but the most important is how dangerous it is. Magic is a very powerful force! Because it is so dangerous, it's long been decided to not teach magic to anyone until they reach the proper age."

I understand what she's saying, but I can't agree with her. I may look like a child, but on the inside I'm well above the proper age! The only one who knows this is me, though. There's nothing I can really do about it, but I'm still impatient.

"Next, we would want to use the Gem of Appraisal to determine your elemental affinity. Learning magics you are not suited to can be a very difficult process."

Gems of Appraisal seem to be magic items capable of showing you the specifics of your stats. Simple ones can apparently be purchased cheaply, but a much more advanced one is required to show elemental affinities. Only the upper echelons of society can acquire a Gem of Appraisal of that caliber. Of course, the Royal Family has one, but I have yet to be appraised.

“My prince, I am sure that you will become a world-class magician, even if you don’t hurry. So, let’s not get too full of ourselves, right?” “Okay!” I reply.

There’s no way I could possibly get too full of myself. After all, I’m still terrified that my younger sister is going to race right past me. It’s still not a good idea to be too reckless, though. Now’s the time to build a solid foundation, to perfect my basic magical abilities. So, I shall continue practicing my manipulation skills.

Chapter 36: Driven into a corner

An enormous swarm of wasps buzzes above me. Well! If I don't get out of here quickly, I'm going to have problems.

Of course, by the time I thought that, it was just a little bit too late.

A wasp lands on my back, and suddenly, a blinding pain shoots through me.

!!!!????

Aaargh!! I've been stabbed! And it feels like something got pumped into me when it happened, too! It's poison?!

It's latched onto my back, where I've got no way to protect myself. Wait... I've got one thing! Now is not the time for me to worry about my last few points of mana!

I grab hold of my silk with Thread Manipulation and stick it to the wasp on my back, immobilizing it.

Off... we... GO!!

Seizing the line, I fling the wasp off of me as if I were doing a shoulder throw!

I really want to finish it off, but now's my chance to escape! I find a craggy spot in the walls to hide in. Hopefully, these rocks will make it hard for those giant wasps to maneuver.

Just as I thought, a few wasps chased after me, but after flying around for a while they figured out the deal and buzzed off.

Ahhh, that was close. I definitely didn't come through unscathed, though. I can't see it for myself, but there's a gaping hole in my back. I've got six health left. One single attack dealt me thirty damage.

This is no surprise. I've been more than well aware that my defense is terrible. Really, I'm grateful that spiders are resilient enough that I can keep going, even with this extremely serious wound.

I'm so glad my Poison Resistance is so high. Whatever that wasp pumped into me was almost certainly some kind of poison. I don't know whether it negated it entirely or not, and I don't know how much of this damage was from the wasp's poison or its stinger, but if I didn't have Poison Resistance I would surely be dead by now.

With wounds like these, I probably shouldn't be moving around. I don't know if it's going to heal on its own, so what I really want to aim for is the full-heal I get out of leveling up. So, since I need experience points, and since I need to get myself some food, I should sneak out and retrieve that wasp I threw off of me a little while ago.

Leaving these crags is no sound plan at all, though. I reach out with Thread Manipulation and start to slowly inch the wasp back towards me.

Suddenly, a chill runs through me.

I peek out from behind the crags. Over there, I see the shape of the wasp I tied up. And, over there, I see yet another monster, slowly approaching.

Elro Baldarad – LV 5 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

It's the snake. This jerk, did he follow me all the way down here?! No, probably not. It's the same level as the other one, but it's probably not the same individual. Yikes. Is this the habitat of these super-strong boss-class monsters? With my body as wounded as it is, I am definitely not looking for a fight.

The snake slowly approaches the fallen wasp. Please, I beg of you, take the wasp and leave me alone!! The snake, however, didn't do anything to the wasp. Rather, it *couldn't* do anything.

With blinding speed, something tears the snake apart.

Uh? Are my eyes working okay? That snake, unless I'm completely mistaken, was shredded into scrap as if it were made of paper. That snake, which was supposed to be protected by its impenetrable scales. That snake, whose speed rivals even my own, was erased before it even had time to react.

Alaba, the Earth Dragon – LV 31 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

It stands, proudly and calmly. Its name might be “dragon”, but its form is really closer to that of a wolf. It walks on four legs. Its tail is long. It has no wings. Even still, with its majestic bearing, it's impossible not to see it as a dragon.

Not good. My instincts as a spider, my reason as a person, everything is screaming at me in unison: this thing is absolutely terrible news. I have zero chance against it. Forget winning or losing, this thing is so out of my league that I shouldn't even bother. If it looks at me, I don't think it would see me as anything but fodder. I'm not even prey. If it sees me, I will become food. That's how far above me that thing is.

Oh, it might have a high level, but that's the least of my problems. No matter how you look at it, that thing is extremely terrible news.

The Earth Dragon, Alaba, starts to slowly devour the scattered pieces of the snake. Panicking, I try to still my breath.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Stealth (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

Ah!! Shut up! Please! Shh!! What are you going to do if it spots me?!

Alaba, the Earth Dragon, finishes devouring the snake and leaves, not even sparing a glance for my wasp.

Ph... phew. I don't know if it completely overlooked me, or if it just decided I wasn't even worth the effort, but, phew, I'm safe for now.

I'm no stranger to life-and-death situations by now, but this is the most terrifyingly close to death I have ever come. I'm still trembling just thinking about it.

This isn't good. If there's something that powerful lurking in this area, I should be doing everything I can to get far away from here.

I check my surroundings. Right now, I'm at the bottom of the huge shaft I fell down a little while ago. I'd estimate that the shaft is about a hundred meters in diameter, and its depth... is probably way more than that, huh. I really have no way to tell; the huge swarm of wasps buzzing overhead is like an impenetrable wall.

I'm glad that Appraisal didn't activate at this range. If it did, the headache from the sheer number of Appraisal results would knock me straight out. If I want to go back the way I came, I'm going to need to get through that swarm. And, on top of that, climb up the cliff.

That's impossible. If I'm clinging to the wall, I can't fight. I won't be able to move quickly, and I won't be able to aim my thread. That's a zone where all of my most reliable strengths are sealed away. The wasps certainly will have no trouble with their mobility, flying through the air. There's no way for me to win.

Even still, with a monster like *that* lurking around, exploration is basically suicide. There are a bunch of passageways connected to the base of this pit... if it really came down to it, could I maybe try going down a different one? Nope. With a wound like this, even if I didn't encounter another ludicrous monster like that, I'd still be toast even if I found just a regular monster.

This is bad. This might be checkmate.

Chapter 37: Struggling

I waited a good, long while after the Earth Dragon left, constantly keeping an over-watchful eye on my surroundings. There's no way I can relax, just with that. If I don't do *something*, though, it's no use.

I turn towards the wasp that I left tied up over there and extend a thread towards it with Thread Manipulation. Agh, that hurt my back. It doesn't look like I have any problems spinning thread, though. I carefully maneuver the thread out there, and tie it to the wasp.

The wasp is still struggling, but it really doesn't matter. What does matter is that I need to get this thing pulled in before it attracts the attention of another monster. Every time I pull on the thread, my wound aches. The pain is serious, but my health isn't going down at all, so I'm telling myself that this is fine.

Finally, I've retrieved the wasp. I quickly seize it in my Poison Fangs, and clamp down tightly until it stops moving. Hmm, when I think about how effective Poison Fang is on other poison-using monsters, I wonder if I've overleveled both it and Poison Resistance, compared to other monsters? Eh, for now, whatever works is good.

The real problem is what to do next. Frankly, I think exploring this area is basically suicide. If there's anything else out there that's as strong as that Earth Dragon, there is literally zero way that I will survive.

This is real bad. I've crossed many dangerous bridges before, but nothing like this.

You know, maybe I've been a little bit conceited about my combat abilities. Sure, I've been successful with my various sneak-attack strategies as I've been loitering around this dungeon, but my real strength is fighting defensively from within my nest. Even one of my simple homes was able to take down one of those snakes, so if I were to actually put my full efforts into it, I don't think there's a single monster out there that could get through to me. ...Probably.

...well, THAT thing can probably break through. While whistling a jaunty tune, even. It is, at the very least, that powerful.

Silk, poison fangs, sneak attacks, and speed. All of my specialties are nothing more than clever tricks in front of that thing, tricks that are kicked aside by its overwhelming power. This is the second completely undefeatable monster that I've encountered in my brief life as a spider. The first, by the way, was my mother (father?), the giant spider.

Not being able to win is definitely a problem, but way, way worse is the fact that its speed vastly outpaces mine. Usually, if something can break through my nest, I can run away while it's doing so. I may seethe with rage, but I will make it out with my life, thanks to my speed. That thing, however, could catch me.

I can't win if I fight it, and I can't escape if I run away. If I catch its eye, it's all over.

Man, what an unreasonable monster. If I'd known about this, I would have tried facing that other snake's charge instead. At least I'd have a chance then. On top of that, I don't even know if that thing is the only one of its kind down here!

I'm scared. This is the closest I've ever been to death. I'm almost a little surprised that I'm feeling so afraid. I've been through so much ridiculous stuff so far, and I never really felt much fear or nervousness. I thought that maybe I'd mastered those feelings already. Now, though, I know. All the dangers so far have merely not been dangerous enough to make me scared. It's not that I can't feel fear, it's that I didn't need to.

Ha, ha. It's way too late for me to be realizing this. I wish I'd figured this out sooner. If I had, maybe I'd have been a little more aware of how dangerous things could be.

Okay, I think that's enough regretting. Let's figure out how I might survive this.

Step one is securing my safety. It's not going to be much help against the Earth Dragon, but for now I should set up a nest in these crags. Right now, I don't think I'm in any condition to move anywhere else. You could even say I just don't want to leave. So, I'm going to build my home, number three, right here.

Then, if I can, I'm going to lure wasps and other strong monsters in here so that I can kill them. My goal is to level up and get that full heal. Until I fix this wound in my back, there's not much I can do. If any monster, even a weak one, so much as sneezes on me, I'm dead. I really don't want to bank on recovering on my own. Man, I wish I'd picked up Automatic HP Recovery back when I had the chance. Regrets won't fix anything, though; I need to accept my mistakes and move on.

For now, let's focus on getting my base set up. Honestly, this isn't a very good place for a base. It's going to stand out a ton and, of course, if I'm noticed by a monster like that Earth Dragon, I'm toast. With these wounds, though, I don't have much choice. This really comes down to luck. Bad luck.

Okay, my plan is to level up. Once I've fixed this wound, I think I'll be able to get out of this danger zone.

Hmm, do I go up and try to break through the wasp army, or do I stay down here and explore this extremely dangerous area? Either way, it's hell. Man, now that I've fallen down here, I've got the ultimate life-or-death choice in front of me. If I'm lucky, I live, if I'm unlucky, I die. The scales are tipped pretty far towards "die" right now, though. Is it going to keep tipping this way, or can I make it recover?

I need to take action to swing the scales my way. Luckily, I've got enough stamina left to weave a decent nest. This wasp is pretty big, so it'll be a solid meal. Let's extract all the stamina I can from this thing and turn it all into an awesome nest. Everything after that is down to luck and skill.

Chapter 38: Spider vs. Wasp (1)

On the first day, I made the simplest workable nest and went to sleep. I can't really say I slept well, thanks to this backache, but the important part is that I didn't get attacked overnight, which is a huge relief. Even better, I didn't die from my injuries overnight! I breathed a huge sigh of relief when I woke up. After checking my health level, it looked like nothing changed; I was still at six HP. I'm kind of disappointed that it's not recovering on its own, but I'm still happy it didn't go down, either... well, could be better, could be worse.

On the second day, I devoted basically the entire day to expanding and fortifying my nest. My back was still hurting, but I focused on my task and fought through it. Wasps were buzzing around me a ton, but whenever they came close, I stopped working and kept a watchful eye on them. I'm not used to working under these conditions; constantly being vigilant while I work is really nerve-wracking.

I took whatever spare moments I had to work on nibbling away at that wasp from earlier, so I can keep my stamina up. In this situation, if I run out of stamina, the scales will absolutely tip further towards my defeat. I am extremely dependent on my stamina. Weaving threads relies heavily on my stamina, not to mention my other day-to-day activities. On top of that, I need to make sure I save enough stamina for at least one battle. I don't know how easily I'll be able to secure more food after I finish this wasp, so since I've committed to this siege-defense strategy, I need to take extra special care of my stamina.

Also on day two, I realized that the level of Pain Resistance had gone way up. If I'm remembering correctly, the last time it leveled up it hit level two, but while I was working on building the nest the "Voice of Heaven" chimed in,

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Pain Resistance (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7."

So, it jumped straight to level seven. I don't have any solid idea why, but if I had to take a guess, I'd say it probably happened while I was asleep. If proficiency in that goes up when you're in pain, then it makes a ton of sense that it would have gained a bunch of levels while

I was sleeping, what with how miserable I was last night and all. If I think back, maybe I did hear the “Voice of Heaven” say something while I was half-asleep.

Well, now that I know it’s level seven, it seems pretty obvious that Pain Resistance isn’t actually a skill that alleviates pain; if it was, it would be really strange if I was still hurting this bad at level seven. If I had to take a guess, I’d probably say... it lets me endure pain well enough to keep moving. Honestly, could be better, could be worse. This still hurts a ton, and there still is a limit to how much I can move with these wounds. When I first got this skill, I remember feeling like my pain had immediately gotten better, but maybe that was all in my head.

Before the day was out, Pain Resistance made it up to level eight.

Day three. I’ve completely consumed the wasp I dragged in a few days ago. My nest is about as good as it’s going to get, in these conditions, so it’s time to move onto stage two: namely, hunting until I level up.

There’s a problem, though... how am I going to catch anything? These wasps keep coming close, and I know they know I’m here, but none of them are swooping in to attack. I was really expecting them to throw themselves at me without a plan, but I guess I’m not that lucky.

Well, for now, I should keep an eye on the wasps and wait for a good chance to strike. I tried provoking a few of the ones that came near, but nobody took the bait.

From my observations, I’ve learned a few things about these wasps. It looks like they mostly fly around in groups of about five or six, acting independently of each other. Each group has a leader:

High Finjegoat — LV 1 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

A “High” Finjegoat, huh. Its name implies some sort of superiority, so maybe these are individuals that have evolved. Since they’re level one, that seems pretty likely to me. I also see wasps flying around that are levels eight or nine, right on the verge of evolving; when they do, they’ll probably become leaders as well.

The boss wasps are slightly darker-colored than the regular wasps. That’s basically the only difference; their size and shape are basically the same. Appraisal can’t seem to manage to get the stats on these things, but I’d bet that they’re stronger than the ordinary wasps.

Well, I don’t think that even those guys can break through my nest. I think they know it too, which might explain why they’re not attacking me when I’m provoking them. Man, if that’s true, these guys are way smart.

Every so often, an entire group will disappear down one of the corridors at the bottom of the pit; after a while, they’ll come back, bearing fresh prey. Man, those squads look like super-efficient. They really are intelligent! There are a few that wander around aimlessly by themselves, though.

You know what’s great, though? There’s monsters down here that these wasps are able to hunt. Every thing down here is not, after all, as tough as that Earth Dragon! Things are really starting to look up for me, now that I know that.

There are, however, groups that don’t make it back, so I shouldn’t get too careless. After all, a group that doesn’t come back is almost undoubtedly a group that got wiped out before it could make it back. Even some of the successful groups come back bearing their fellow soldiers’ corpses, so I definitely shouldn’t stop thinking of this as a dangerous kind of area.

Unblinkingly, I continue observing the wasps.

Chapter 39: Spider vs. Wasp (2)

At the end of the third day, just as I was starting to think about going to sleep, the “Voice of Heaven” came down from above.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Pain Resistance (LV 9)] has become [Ignore Pain], and a new skill, [Pain Tolerance (LV 1)] has been unlocked.”

Pain Resistance went up again, huh... and it had already leveled from eight to nine without me noticing, probably when I was sleeping again. The level number disappeared, and the name changed to “Ignore Pain”. Feels like it capped out. That gives me two max-level skills, next to Night Vision. I think I started out with a high level in Night Vision already, though, thanks to my natural-born abilities, so Ignore Pain is the first skill I’ve raised all the way up from zero to ten by myself! I don’t really feel like celebrating, though, because grinding that out was literally suffering.

Well, it looks like the skill I just unlocked is the actual “pain hurts less” skill. Ah, no, I’m not saying that Pain Resistance was a rip-off or anything, just that it wasn’t what I was expecting. The new skill is only level one right now, so I’m not feeling much of an effect. As always, my back is rather rudely reminding me how badly it’s still wounded. I’m hoping it’ll be a little more polite about it once I get a few levels of Pain Tolerance, and I’m really hoping that it’ll level up overnight.

Well then, good night!

Day Four. My stamina has started to steadily fall, so it’s time to take action. My target are the lone wasps that drift away from the swarm. Trying to get an entire squad of wasps is too risky. I think I could beat them, sure, but I need to be cautious: since there’s a bunch of wasps in a squad, it’s not impossible that they’ll do something completely unexpected.

So, snagging one of the loners is probably my best bet. It looks like they're not quite as smart when they're not being ordered around by a commander. While I was observing them yesterday, I saw a lone wasp fly through a tiny tunnel that a squad definitely couldn't fit through. I'd bet that the wasp I caught a while ago had done something similar, going down a strange passage, getting lost, and eventually winding up in my webs. Hmm, that was a long time ago, though, and really far away; it's really unlikely that the wasp from back then came from this swarm. Maybe there's another hive somewhere else?

From what I've been seeing so far, the ones that wander off are already not very bright. Maybe that's why they never joined a squad and were content with wandering off? Ah, regardless, the point is, if I provoke one of the strays, it might be dumb enough to come and attack.

I'd never rely on such an uncertain strategy, though... not when I have the new secret weapon I developed yesterday!

It's a hardened sphere of sticky silk at the end of a long cord. I call it: the Silken Smasher¹! Eheheh. With my raw physical strength plus the power of Thread Manipulation, I'll be able to strike those wasps out of the sky! ...Probably. It's, uh, worth noting that I'm probably going to miss with this, nine times out of ten. But that's okay! All I'm really trying to do is get these things to realize that I'm an enemy, and come charging at me of its own accord. If I get super lucky and hit it directly, then my target will be immediately trapped, which is my victory anyway.

Now, I just have to wait for the perfect chance, for one of the loner wasps to come close enough to my nest. If today is anything like yesterday, a bunch of them will be buzzing by to get a closer look at my web, so everything should go as planned.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Pain Tolerance (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

As I waited, Pain Tolerance leveled up again. Huh? Compared to Pain Resistance, this is leveling up super slowly! I was really expecting it to go up to about level five while I was

asleep, but it only went up to two... hmm? I wonder if the way I accumulate proficiency is different? Or maybe, is the amount of proficiency I need to accumulate different? Ahhh, I don't know.

Although, that level up made this extremely obvious: Pain Tolerance is, in fact, a skill that dulls pain. Thanks to my new skill level, my back is feeling much better.

The wound on my back is a severe one. I did my best to bandage it up with Thread Manipulation, but this is seriously a gaping hole. If I was a human, this would absolutely have killed me. I wonder, am I still alive because I'm a spider, or because I'm a monster? Regardless, it is a miracle that I'm alive with a wound this bad. I wanted to make sure no more poison was left in the wound, so I tried cleaning it out with Thread Manipulation. This hurt so bad I thought I was going to die.

I have to level up as quickly as I can, to fix this wound. If I leave it as it is, it's only going to get worse from here. It could fester, it could get necrotic, it could get infected... I cleaned it out with silk, but it's nowhere near as good as washing it with clean water, let alone actually disinfecting it. I really need to do something before my symptoms get worse.

And, just like that, a chance appears.

A single loner wasp makes its way over here. There's no other wasps nearby! If there were, they'd probably come rushing to protect their comrade once he got into trouble. This situation is perfect: I don't have to worry about that at all.

I ready the Silken Smasher. Focus... focus... aaaaaaim... THERE!

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Concentration (LV 1)].”

Oh, it hit. And it seems like I got a skill at the same time.

Oh, man, I did not think that would hit at all. The Silken Smasher hit it dead on! Using Thread Manipulation, I unravel it and use the thread to wrap up the captured wasp. I drag the violently struggling bundle back into my nest, and it falls prey to my poison fangs.

Whoa. A perfect success on my very first try. This is a great omen! Ah, no, no, I am not going to let myself get cocky again. We all know what happened last time I did. Now, I walk with humility. Well then, let's celebrate this important first step with this long-awaited meal. Let's dig in!

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *This is yet another un-translatable bit that I've mangled into place. The Japanese word for spider is “kumo”, so the author used the portmanteau “kumorningstar”. Alas, I could not come up with a way to smash the word “spider” (or “silk” or “thread”) into “morningstar” without making the base word, morningstar, unrecognizable. So, in the grand tradition of manga translators coming up with unnecessarily cool names for special attacks, I’m calling it a “Silken Smasher”.*

Chapter 40: Spider vs. Wasp (3)

For now, I've secured a source of food. This wasp is big enough that I'll be able to stave off starvation for another few days, so I don't need to worry about my stamina at all. I have way more options available to me now.

Most realistically, I should keep doing the same thing, doing this small-scale hunting thing until my level goes up. I can eke out a safe, honest living that way, not taking any unnecessary risks.

I had another idea, though: work on expanding my nest. Upward.

Exploring this floor warrants a big fat "nope". It's not a question can or can't. Nnnnoooope! That dragon's too scary. Noooo can do.

So, if that's my plan, creeping my way up this wall will let me get back to the tunnels from before. In order to do that, I'm going to need some way to avoid all of those wasps. If I were to just climb up as-is, those wasps would eat me alive! I need some sort of countermeasure.

I've thought about it somewhat, and my best plan so far is somehow extending my nest vertically. It's less a plan and more of an application of brute force... ah, and what a blatant use of force it is. Really, though, it's all I've been able to come up with so far.

There are, of course, problems. First of all, weaving a nest like that is going to burn through all of my stamina. I've never tried to build a nest up a wall before! I have no idea how much more stamina it'll take than usual. This is a seriously huge project, and the stamina from the single wasp I've caught so far isn't going to last me very long at all. I'm going to have to replenish it, somehow.

On top of that, there is an excellent chance that I'm going to have to fight a bunch of wasps. Down here, they're overlooking me, but if I start to encroach on their domain up above, they're going to have problems with that. A violation of sovereign airspace. I wonder if they'll be able to overlook that... The absolute worst case scenario is that hundreds, no,

thousands of bees will all swarm in and attack me at once. This would be a straight-up nightmare; there's no way my nest could withstand an attack of that magnitude.

I shouldn't just be worried about the wasps, either. There haven't been many other monsters that have come wandering into this pit, other than the snake and the Earth Dragon from before. If that dragon were to wander in here, though... Last time, I escaped by hiding in these crags, but if I start extending my nest it is going to stick out like a sore thumb, and if the dragon takes notice... I'm dead. Even after all this time, I'm terrified that the Earth Dragon is going to appear at any second.

So, if this works, I can finally get out of this mega-danger zone, but there are some serious risks involved. I really don't have a better plan, either. There could be one, but I certainly haven't thought of it.

So, then. Commence the preparations for nest extension!

First up is the foundation. When building a house, you must start with a sturdy foundation, after all; it's not a stretch at all to say that the quality of a house is decided by the quality of its foundation. And, here's a good, sturdy rock!

It's the first rock that I took shelter behind. It is seriously huge, about seven meters high and five meters wide, sitting slightly away from the wall. I'll use that one as the foundation, so I'll start expanding my nest over that way.

What I've got so far is a web connecting one side of the rock to the wall, with a little horizontal bit jutting out. First, I need to link the other side of the rock to the wall and web that up. Next up is a diagonal thread that connects the top of the rock to the wall... then, using that as a base, connect it to my other walls. With this, my foundation is complete!

Now, it's time to try to expand things up a little bit. I snack on the wasp to get my stamina back up, then get back to work. While I'm working, I notice a few wasps silently watching me, but, as expected, they don't approach. Looks like I'm still far enough down that they'll keep overlooking me.

I wrap up my work for the day, finish eating up the wasp, and call it a night.

Day Five. It feels like my back is a little less sore than before. My health is, of course, still six. Since the wound hasn't gotten any better, I guess my Pain Tolerance skill leveled up again while I was sleeping. Probably.

It's really great that the pain's going away. I've still been able to move around without any trouble thanks to Ignore Pain, but there's a night-and-day difference in my mood now that I'm not hurting any more. Ah, no, the pain hasn't gone away completely, and the wound still isn't cured, but this is way nicer. I never had a wound nearly this bad when I was a human. The worst pain I can remember was stubbing my pinky toe on the doorframe. That really hurt, but it doesn't even begin to compare to having a huge, gaping wound opened up in my back.

Thanks to my elevated spirits, work goes great!

As I'm working, one of the loner wasps buzzes over. There's a full squad nearby, though. Umf...

Now's a pretty good opportunity to run a little experiment, so I think I'll provoke this loner wasp. If I threaten the loner, will the squad react? If they do, I can immediately escape deep into my nest. If they don't, I can do it like I did before

I ready a Silken Smasher. Oh, yeah, didn't I pick up a Concentration skill last time I did this? What does that do, just increase my ability to focus? ...Eh, it's level one, so the effects aren't going to be huge, so I'll just leave it be for now.

Wait, no, concentrate, concentrate. Heh, thinking about Concentration ruined my concentration. Aim caaaaarefully... there!!

Ah, it hit.

Wha, what?! I'm awesome, aren't I? I was thinking "oh man there's no way this is gonna hit, heh" and then I got a direct hit two out of two times! Me, who consistently ranked lowest in the class for physical strength; me, who could barely even throw a softball...

Uh, whoops, in my surprise I completely forgot to keep track of that squad. They are... oh, there they are! Umf, no reaction at all. Man, can I really attack these loners without facing a counterattack? That's really heartless, you know, guys? Or maybe this is just how severe life in the wild is. Well, regardless, either way this is great for me. I can pick off the loners at my leisure.

Chuckling happily to myself, I bring the captured wasp back into my lair, and finish it off with Poison Fang.

Side Story 5: Gem of Appraisal

Today is the long-awaited day where I finally get my stats checked with the Gem of Appraisal. There are stats in this world. I can't say that I haven't wondered why that is, since this is reality and not a game, but I've given up on looking for the answer. The explanation is pretty simple: that's just how this world is.

Yes, a simple explanation. This world really is very much like a game. If you work hard enough, you'll earn a reward, just like that. Sure, there seem to be differences in raw talent, but if I compare it to Earth, this really does seem to be a world where your efforts are acknowledged far more easily. At any rate, these rewards come in the form of things called "skills".

To earn a skill, you must perform actions that match what that skill does. As you do so, you accumulate a number of "proficiency points", and when you've earned enough of those, you earn the skill. Once you've earned it, you can start using it immediately. On top of that, if you keep using the skill, you keep earning more proficiency points, until you pass a certain threshold and the skill's level increases. The harder you work on it, the better it gets. There's no such thing as an effort gone to waste! Truly, this is a magnificent world.

Ever since I was born, Anna and Clevea have been tutoring me, so by now I've picked up quite a few skills. The more I did, the more I got out of it, and I got swept away by the thrill of greedily acquiring skill after skill. Sue has always been by my side, mimicking me, and has picked up a lot of skills herself. Sometimes, we overdo it, and Anna and Clevea get angry, but they do it out of love.

In a game, more strength equals more fun. There are other players that like to pace themselves, but I always try to get as strong as I can as fast as I can. This is doubly true now that I'm not just leveling a game character, I'm working on strengthening my own self.

It's all well and good to work on getting stronger, but there's one inconvenient thing about this world: I have no way to check my stats. This world definitely has the concept of an individual's statistics, but trying to see them is extremely difficult.

To do so, you need a skill called “Appraisal”. If you have that skill, you can use it to see someone’s statistics, but there are few humans in the world who can use it. In order to start building proficiency points, you must first build a deep understanding of what makes something valuable and a sense of what materials things are made of, much like an appraiser does back on Earth. The level of technical skill required is far beyond what a novice can muster. Even if you can somehow acquire the skill, raising its level is an extremely difficult task, so there are very few humans out there who can truly use it.

It’s not impossible, though, if you just want to easily acquire the skill. If you have any of these things called “skill points”, you can spend them in order to acquire a skill directly. Even a skill as difficult as Appraisal can be acquired, as long as you have enough skill points to spend. Even if you do so, though, you can’t really go very much further.

To level Appraisal, you have to use it. Using it grants you proficiency points, and, once you’ve accumulated enough, the level goes up. However, activating Appraisal is actually pretty hard on your mind.

Appraisal requires neither magic nor willpower to activate. It’s definitely wrong to say, though, that you can activate it as much as you want. If you fall into that trap, you’ll be assaulted by severe headaches and a sort of intoxicated feeling. The limit varies from person to person, but apparently there are people who can’t even use it once without falling ill. Even if you’re talented, trying to appraise two things at a time will leave you ill, with a crippling headache.

Since just activating it once could cause such serious effects, activating it over and over again in order to grind out your skill proficiency would carry a terrible cost. And, on top of all that, if you don’t get it up to a high enough level, it’s effectively useless. Thanks to that, there aren’t very many people alive who can use Appraisal effectively. Apparently, it’s a profession that’s passed down from parent to child.

So, to solve the problem of people still needing to be able to check their stats, this thing called a Gem of Appraisal was introduced. If you can acquire one of these rare, specially-crafted magic items, you can temporarily use Appraisal as if you had the skill yourself. The

skill level varies depending on the quality of the Gem, and the one owned by the royal family is, naturally, beyond compare: it's level ten, a level that no other stone in the world can match. Of course, its use requires special permission, so it's really only the royal family and their most valued friends amongst the high-ranking nobility.

Since I'm a member of the royal family, using it will be no problem. However, even though I'm a prince, I can't just use it whenever I want. No matter how many tantrums I threw to try to convince Anna, she was very insistent: you can't get permission until you're old enough. Of course, once you're old enough to appraise your statistics the first time, it's treated as a special event. Even if you're merely a noble, there are still rites to be held, a majestic ceremony for a child's first Appraisal. I, of course, still have to go through with this ceremony.

These ceremonies are not just for Appraisal: they also serve as the child's first appearance before the nobility. The Appraisal results are displayed such that all of the gathered adults can see them as well. I don't think it will be a problem that my skills are atypical for someone my age, but I'm a little terrified that my stats will be so low that my family will abandon me.

In any event, Sue and I are making our grand debut here. We've been dressed in our ceremonial children's clothes, and have been drilled endlessly on the ceremonial rites. In attendance will be the current King; that is, our father. Even more, it looks like there's someone especially important in attendance, so it is extremely crucial that we don't mess up at all. Even if we're children, we are members of the royal family. We are the stars of this occasion, so we must present ourselves all of the dignity and grace that is expected of the royal family. This is a lot to ask of me; I used to be a lowly commoner in my previous life. However, when I saw how magnificently my little sister was standing beside me, I was filled with determination. I must do this.

"Are you ready, my Prince?" asks Anna, solemnly. I silently nod. "Then, after you."

Anna pushes lightly at our backs, and Sue and I enter, side by side, into the assembly hall.

Author's note: This is turned out somewhat longer than I was expecting, so I'm cutting it off here. It will continue in chapter S06.

Chapter 41: Finally, the level up I've been praying for!

After killing a few more lone wasps, I finally heard that voice.

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 2 to level 3. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Strength (LV 1)] skill has been raised to level 2, your skill [Toughness (LV 1)] skill has been raised to level 2, and your skill [Overeating (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

The level up that I've been waiting for all this time comes at me in an instant! My skin rustles as it peels away from my body. Somehow, although I can't really describe how, I can feel that the wound on my back has closed completely.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Automatic HP Recovery (LV 1)].”

...Huh? Really? Ohh! Now this is a surprise. So, uh, does this mean that my full-heal on level up is a kind of automatic recovery? I am extremely, unbelievably happy about this, but, man, I really could have used this earlier... My life wouldn't have been nearly this hard if I'd had such luxuries available to me.

No, I shouldn't be complaining. This really is luxurious! My anxieties about if I would ever level up have vanished. This is when I should be smiling thankfully.

Seriously, though, things had gotten pretty dangerous. My health, which had been stuck at six for a while, went down to five on its own, so I got seriously worried about my continued existence. It kept going down, too, and by the time I leveled up it was all the way down to three. Seriously dangerous. I clamped down on my anxious heart, and threw everything I had into hunting stray wasps.

Hunting the loners was remarkably easy, though! Unlike what I'd expected at first, my accuracy with the Silken Smasher has been one hundred percent. This was a serious surprise, you knooow! Is this another thing that spiders can just do naturally? Regardless, on top of that, I picked up my first level in both [Throw] and [Aiming]! Both of these are probably skills that give me a passive bonus, I think.

And on top of all that, I got three bonus skill levels when I leveled this time! I don't know what any of them actually do, but since I've somehow accumulated some skill proficiency, I've probably been benefiting from them unconsciously. I don't... think... there's any downsides to this... probably. I'm a little bit concerned about Overeating, though...

Thanks to all the web-weaving and wasp-hunting I've been doing, my silk-related skills have gone up quite a bit, too! My Spider Silk is now at level eight, and Thread Manipulation is up to level five. Thread Manipulation is way more useful than I thought it was gonna be. Now that it's level five, its accuracy and speed have gone up quite a bit. Picking this up was absolutely the right choice.

Pain Tolerance also hit level five, so my back was actually pretty comfortable. This skill is pretty awesome; it alleviates pain, but it leaves enough feeling that you have a sense of how bad your injuries are. Pain is a great indicator of danger, so feeling it is actually pretty important. If it disappears entirely, you'll have no idea of how dangerous any of your injuries are. This skill, though, still gives me that sense of danger, despite taking the pain away. It's hard to describe... wounds have a sense of... uneasiness about them, I guess, that is distinctly different from actual pain. So, taking away the pain isn't a problem at all. Ah, well, it's only level five, so it's not like it gets rid of it completely.

Well then! I leveled up after all this time, so let's check out my new stats!

Small Taratekt — LV 3 — (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 38/38 (green)

MP: 38/38 (blue)

SP: 38/38 (yellow), 38/38 (red)

Avg. Offense: 21

Avg. Defense: 21

Avg. Magic Power: 19

Avg. Resistance: 19

Avg. Speed: 369

Oh ho! All three meters went up by two, as did Offense and Defense, and Magic Power and Resistance went up by one. But uh, hey, Speed, what are you doing? I remember you being 348 before, and then you gained... twenty one points...? Isn't that a little weird? The other stats were a little more reserved about it... aren't you trying a little too hard? ...Offense, Defense, why did you go up the same amount? You're leaving Magic Power and Resistance in the dust, you know... Uuuuunbelievable...

Ah, well, I'm going to have to ignore my unbalanced stats for now. Gotta focus on the present.

At long last, I've leveled up and regained all of my health, so now I can focus my full efforts on getting out of here. With my injuries as bad as they were, my work was slower than I would have liked; plus, I had to be extra cautious. From now, on, though, I'm going to keep hunting the loner wasps for stamina while extending my nest higher and higher.

By now, I've made it about one quarter of the way to my goal at the top. I've still got a loooong ways to go. So far the wasps haven't been aggressive or even just intimidating. I have no idea how long that's going to last, though, so I need to make sure I'm still building this strong enough to withstand attack. This is crucial... but man, it's way hard. Unlike building a regular nest at ground level, this climbing nest is super challenging! The higher I go, the harder it gets. I keep having to run a thick support thread from the foundation rock to the wall above me, and then I have to bind it tightly to the rest of the structure. I'm only a quarter of the way there, and this work is getting harder and harder as I climb.

I've got no choice, though, I have to do it. I have no idea if or when that Earth Dragon is going to show back up here. What I do know is that I want to be far, far away from here when it does happen. Worst case scenario, I have to abandon my nest halfway through and just charge straight up as fast as I can and hope for the best. This is, of course, extremely

dangerous... but if I stay down here, my death is inevitable. So, until then, I'm going to keep building this web higher and higher. I absolutely do not want to stay down here.

Chapter 42: Spider vs. Wasp (4)

Ah, is it finally happening?

Finjegoat – LV 6 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Finjegoat – LV 4 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Finjegoat – LV 5 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Finjegoat – LV 5 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

High Finjegoat – LV 1 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Hovering in the sky before my eyes is a squadron of wasps, and they sure don't look like they're just here to watch. They're giving off an atmosphere of hostility, like they've finally seen me as a threat and are here to settle things.

My nest stretches up about halfway to my goal. As I've been building higher and higher, the wasp's attitudes have been changing bit by bit, but it looks like I finally hit a point where they just can't leave me alone anymore.

But still, they just sent one squadron. Are they not taking me seriously, or are they just testing the waters? Regardless, in my nest I can totally win against just one squad.

I ready my Silken Smasher. I've been building the walls of this nest out of a fine mesh, but I've left cracks for me to throw my weapons out of. Of course, even though there's cracks, it's not like they're big enough for those two-meter-long wasps are going to be able to get through them. My foes have no way to get through to me, but I can attack outside as much as I want. Well, they can always run away, though, so it's really more of a tie.

The two level fives rush in to assault my nest. Heh. Even when there's two of them attacking simultaneously, my nest doesn't even budge. My Spider Silk skill is level eight! Even when it was low-leveled, my silk was something I was proud of, and now that it's this high-level, it's only gotten better. Just like that, it was able to withstand two of those wasps directly charging into it, without moving an inch! Even though they came at me with their

impressive bulk and their great speed, there was literally no damage at all. It literally didn't even shudder from the impact.

The threads I've surrounded my nest with are maximally strong, with just enough rubbery elasticity to be excellent shock absorbers. I designed it so that the threads can expand and contract somewhat, in order to absorb a certain amount of shock. Two wasps ramming into it head-on did nothing! It can absorb at least that amount. If it couldn't, then I'd have to rely solely on the raw strength of the threads to keep things together.

It's not like those wasps' attacks are particularly weak, or anything. From my observations, these wasps are, hm, how do I say it... strong. They drag all sorts of prey back here, including those huge snakes!

They can attack unopposed from the air, with their poisoned stingers and powerful physiques. Under any normal circumstances, they would be a huge threat! No ordinary attacks can reach them when they're in the air, so they can attack without fear of reprisal. Ah, hm, this might be why they seem so weak to my anti-air attacks. My perfect accuracy with the Silken Smasher may be because they just simply aren't expecting anything to hit them!

Thanks to all that, an ordinary battle with these wasps would be extremely difficult. Yes, an ordinary battle. My home, my trump card, is not, however, ordinary. It possesses extraordinary resilience, extraordinary binding power, and extraordinary siege potential! I'll bet these wasps haven't ever seen any tactics like these. This is, after all, what happens when a spider's strongest trump card is wielded by a human's powerful intellect.

For now, I'll ignore the two wasps that got stuck in my nest after they body-checked it. I turn to the remaining three wasps, who still haven't grasped the severity of their situation, and hurl my Silken Smasher! Their leader is completely unable to avoid it, and takes it full on. This was my goal all along. I crack my thread like a whip, and the centrifugal force slams my foe down into my nest. The leader has been neutralized.

The remaining two wasps panic, not knowing what to do now that their leader's been taken out. Perfect targets. I fling out the Silken Smasher yet again and dispatch the higher-level

one. After that, the remaining wasp gets its head together, but its next move is awful. I don't know if it was expecting a turnabout, but it charges straight at me! Didn't you learn anything from the other two that tried that? Well, unfortunately, that desperate attack completely fails to reach me, and there's one more wasp stuck in my webs.

It was over too quickly. The wasps I thought were so dreadful and terrible when I first fell down here have no strategy to deal with me once I've built a nest! If it can withstand a straight-on charge without even shuddering, then no matter how many wasps may attack, they'll never reach me! This alone is proof of the ridiculous defensive strength of my nest.

In a video game, if your defense stats are high enough, attacks from weaker characters won't deal you any damage at all. It looks like that's holding true for my nest against those wasps. I had imagined that the wasps wouldn't be able to break through, but I was figuring that they'd at least do enough damage that I'd have to do some maintenance every once in a while.

There are still hundreds of pathetic little wasps buzzing around above me. I remember the terror I felt when I first realized how many there were... but, now that I have my indestructible nest, it's an entirely different story. It doesn't matter if you bring hundreds, or even thousands, if you cannot break through my webs, your stingers shall never reach me!

My chances of escape are looking better and better. In an excellent mood, I finish off these captured wasps and get back to work.

Chapter 43: Spider vs. Earth Dragon.....eh?

After my successful defeat of the first squadron, the wasps started attacking continuously. I wiped out the second squad they sent at me without any trouble, but after that, things started getting a little hairy. They started sending multiple squads at once. No waaaaay! I mean, this is the right thing for the wasps to be doing, but, please look at it from my perspective! I don't want this many wasps to come! I'm still totally safe in my nest, but there's this constant feeling of pressure, you know! What am I supposed to do about all of these wasps constantly buzzing around me, day and night?

I sigh a little and look around me. Everywhere I look is wasps, wasps, wasps. Seriously, guys, what's up with you? With this many of you this close, your buzzing is no joke! You're seriously annoying! You're so loud I can't sleep!

On top of that, if I do manage to shoot all of you down, I can't eat that much! Sure, my Overeating skill might let me eat more than I could before, but even that is nearing its limit! I was complaining that one of these things was too huge, and then I got five more. Eating all that brought Overeating all the way up to level three, didn't it?

The worst part of this is that, while I'm being harassed by these wasps, work on my nest has stopped completely! My absolute top priority is escaping. Not dealing with wasps. But now, thanks to this unrelenting onslaught, my construction work can't continue. I'd really prefer if they stopped attacking and left me alone... I already have more than enough food. Well, it's not like they could understand that, anyway.

I really have no choice but to thread a little more work in between each attack. With the wasps being as vigilant as they are, leaving my nest is straight-up suicidal. The "charge straight to the top" plan I was thinking about before is definitely impossible. My speed may be 369, but I won't get anywhere that amount when I'm charging straight up a wall. If I run into any wasps on my way up, it's plain to see that I'll be stabbed straight to death.

Ahhhhh, son of a bitch! I really don't want to get slowed down like this! What happens if that Earth Dragon suddenly shows up? ...If that Earth Dragon... suddenly...

A tremendous chill runs down my spine.

Alaba, the Earth Dragon – LV 31 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

The last guy I ever wanted to see has arrived. What's worse, it looks like he is quite interested in my nest.

Wh... what do I do?! Wait, no, what *can* I do? Nothing. I can't do anything. Not against an opponent like that. I have, basically, one option: pray with all of my heart that he is going to pass me by.

My prayers, however, are ripped to shreds.

The Earth Dragon opens its mouth. A dragon's greatest weapon is, without a doubt, its breath weapon.

A thunderous roar splits the air. A blast of pressure rips forth. A terrible vortex of destruction swallows everything in front of it.

What happened next, I'm not so sure about. It's pretty easy to put the pieces together, though. The big, sturdy rock I had used as the foundation for my nest simply vanishes, along with a huge chunk of the wall behind it. An enormous crack runs up the wall above the blast site. Chunks of the wall start to rapidly break off; a literal cave-in. In a single blow, the bottom half of my nest was destroyed. The remaining top half was soon swallowed within the collapsing wall.

I was in the top half, spared from the direct effects of that breath weapon. I fell, surrounded by my broken webs, unable to do anything. I helplessly fall to the ground below. Oof. My health meter empties in an instant, but I'm still alive somehow. I'm alive, but I don't know for how long. Everything is up to the dragon, now.

I'm covered in layers of my own silk webbing. I'll get stuck in if I touch the sticky parts, even though it's my own thread. That's really not a problem, though, not now. This might actually be lucky. If I'm covered in a pile of silk, the dragon might not be able to see me amongst the wreckage. He might even think I'm a rock, if I had to take a guess! If I just lie perfectly still, maybe he'll miss me entirely?

Seizing this faint hope, I hold my breath, and clamp down on the fear that trembles through my body.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Fear Resistance (LV 1)].”

My trembling lessens by just a fraction, but I'm still scared. I am still quivering in abject terror! I'm scared i'm scared i'm scared i'm scared i'm scared i'm scared i'm scaaaaared!!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Stealth (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Stealth (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Automatic HP Recovery (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Stealth (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5.”

The, ahah, “Voice of Heaven” pulls me back together. Or, maybe, it’s the five levels of Fear Resistance that I earned while lying here trembling. I have no idea how long I’ve been hiding here. From the number of skill levels I got, it feels like forever. I check my stamina meter to see if I can tell how long it’s been by how much it’s gone down, but for whatever reason it’s still at max.

I use Thread Manipulation to rip off the threads stuck to my body. From my earlier experimentation, I learned that I can use Thread Manipulation to change the properties of my silk somewhat, even after I’ve detached it from myself. Now, I decrease the adhesiveness and peel it back, slowly crawling out from under the pile of silk. The Earth Dragon is gone.

Oh man, I’m lucky.

Chapter 44: Escape from Despair

I survived. I am grateful beyond belief. I'm alive. What an amazing thing to be.

As I think that, though, I can't stop faint feelings of despair from creeping in. What on earth am I going to do now?

My nest is gone. Completely, utterly, gone. I caught a fleeting glimpse on my way out of the destruction wreaked by that breath-like weapon.

There's an enormous crater in the wall where it once stood.

Ha ha. A crater in the wall, that's kinda weird! How did that even happen? Isn't a crater supposed to be something that happens when a meteorite or whatever crashes into the ground? What on earth could put a crater in a vertical surface? On top of that, didn't it have to blow through that huge rock too? Yeah, kinda weird.

Even when I was dazed and defenseless, the wasps didn't attack. Those guys are probably just as terrified of the Earth Dragon as I am. It's just that powerful of a being. Anyone would be terrified. Even I'm terrified.

Seriously, what do I do now? Breaking through the wasps and returning to my original tunnels is... possible. That's only if I disregard the Earth Dragon, though. This time, I survived through pure luck. Next time, though, I don't think I'll be anywhere near as lucky. Based on that thing's actions, it's clear that it recognized my nest as a particularly troublesome thing to deal with. Otherwise, there's no way it would let loose such a ridiculous attack. From here on out, whenever I build a nest, I need to acknowledge the high chance that the Earth Dragon is going to take offense.

So, I can't make a nest. Or, rather, I'm terrified, so I'm not going to. My spirit has been broken. I absolutely do not want to anger my superior, the Earth Dragon.

Maybe I'm wrong, maybe the Earth Dragon destroyed my nest on a whim, but I can't say that a creature that powerful would attack like it did without some level of thought behind it. It really doesn't matter either way, though, since I'm too weak to do anything about it. If I meet it, I will die. That's it.

Twice so far, I've been able to escape. Both of those times have been extremely lucky. I don't think it was entirely luck though. Even though that thing is monstrously powerful, it wasn't able to see me while I was hiding... right?

Yeah, I think so. I really want to think so. If I don't, I'll lose that last thin thread of hope I've been hanging on.

My single way to survive. If I keep myself absolutely hidden, I'll somehow be able to make it out of the Earth Dragon's territory. I've got no other options.

I'll need to rely on my Stealth skill. When I first got it, I didn't think it would help me all that much, but now it's my only lifeline. Its level is five, which is, quite honestly, not great, but I've got no other choice.

I focus my thoughts. First off, I have to figure out which direction the Earth Dragon went. I survey the ground around me, and notice that it's left splendidly clear footprints. They lead off away from me... in that direction, it looks like there's just one big tunnel. Back there, it seems, is where the Earth Dragon lurks. Just realizing that makes me nervous.

I should go down the path that points as far away from the Earth Dragon's as possible. That much is obvious. Who'd be so stupid as to aimlessly meander towards it? To be honest, though, I have no idea where this path may lead. Putting my fears aside, the best way to get out of here would be to try climbing again. Putting my feelings aside, I think it would really be my best chance for survival. Seriously, though, that's still impossible. I don't need to think about this one, I can feel it in my gut.

If I proceed slowly and keep myself hidden, I'll be able to move forward. Staying hidden will be hard... where's a cardboard box when you need one? Heh... Looks like my mood's recovering a little bit, huh?

Speaking of recovering, it looks like that huge pile of damage I took when I fell has already been healed, thanks to Automatic HP Recovery! Man, I really should have spent all of those skill points on this, instead of that worthless Detection skill. It's fantastic that I was able to acquire it on my own, though. I wonder how quickly I regenerate? I didn't really have the luxury of being able to watch my meters fill back up back then. It's still low-level, so I can't rely on it for rapid recovery, but I shouldn't need to be overly concerned about a few scrapes every now and then.

Ahhhh, I didn't really think about it much back then, but I did notice that my red Stamina bar wasn't going down at all! I wonder why that is? I've never noticed anything like this before... Maybe there's some sort of condition that stops it from decreasing, but I really have no idea what it could possibly be. ...I don't think this is the case, but... is this a bug? Is my stamina going down without the meter being updated? Ah, that would suuuck! I couldn't do anything if I suddenly ran out of stamina. Hey, Ms. Appraisal, I can believe in you, right? You're a can-do kinda girl, right? I trust you, but... with things like this... can I really believe in you?

I think Appraisal might level up soon. It's been a while since it last leveled, and I've been using it constantly since then. Since getting it up to level six made it a billion times more useful, I have really high hopes for level seven. I will be grateful beyond belief if it gives me a skill readout or anything like that. Having all of these skills I know nothing about is seriously inconvenient, you know! I might even have some skill hidden away that will turn this entire situation around! Even if I'm expecting too much of it, maybe there's something that will make things even just a little bit better.

Even the tiniest little advantage I can scrape together in order to get out of here would be amazing. What about a skill that gives me the location of all of the nearby enemies? If I had that, I could constantly be checking to make sure the Earth Dragon wasn't anywhere near me as I move forward. It would be great if I could use Detection like that, huh... I've given up hope on that by now, though.

I could really use a map, too! I don't know if this tunnel is going to lead me to a safe place or not. There's actually a pretty decent chance that this links directly up with another danger zone! If that happens, I'll probably die... right?

Well, for now, all I can really rely on is my own terrible luck. Please, if I may be so bold, let this passage bring me to somewhere safe!

Chapter 45: The Depths of the Great Elro Labyrinth

This path I've been following is pretty big.

Well, it's got to be pretty big if those two-and-a-half meter wasps can fly about freely. Even that five-meter praying mantis can move freely, too!

Elro Greshgard — LV 3 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

A swarm of wasps are swarming around a giant praying mantis, who is slashing back at them with the giant sickles on its forelegs. Unlike an ordinary praying mantis, though, this guy has six. Like an Asura. The wasps want to strike from the air, but they don't want to get in range of those sickles... what a stalemate.

As for me, I'm sneakily observing these proceedings from behind a rock. It looks like neither party has noticed me just yet. It looks like my Stealth skill is far more effective than I was giving it credit for! I sneak a peep over my rock in order to activate Appraisal.

Elro Greshgard: *A praying mantis-like monster that inhabits the Lower Depths of the Great Elro Labyrinth. The attacks it makes with its sickles are extremely powerful.*

Oh! One of the wasps just got bisected by a sickle. Whooooa, those things must be crazy sharp to cut a wasp in half with a single blow! Man, if those things are that ridiculously sharp, they might even be able to cut through my silk! Well, since they haven't noticed me, I have the great privilege of just being able to sneakily scuttle by as I please.

Oh yeah, before I forget, I should look up these new vocabulary words I got from Appraisal.

The Lower Depths of the Great Elro Labyrinth: *The area between the middle and lowest strata of the Great Elro Labyrinth. Many powerful monsters inhabit this level.*

Ahhh, I see! These are the lower depths, huh... And there's even more below me, huhhh... And there's tons of strong monsters down here, huuuhhhh...

I didn't want to know any of that.

By the way, I did in fact try looking up the “middle stratum” and the “lowest stratum”, but all I got was “the stratum in the middle” and “the stratum which, out of all of the strata, is the deepest.” Why do I bother, Appraisal?

Although, it seems like this is not actually the deepest layer like I thought it was; there's even more below. I can't help but imagine that the bottom-most layer is packed to the gills with absurdly powerful monsters. Ugh, this is, of course, the world's largest dungeon, and when I think of a dungeon, I think of a place where the monsters get stronger and stronger the deeper in you go. If my current stratum really is filled with powerful monsters, then it's totally not unreasonable to think that the lowest layer could be crawling with Earth Dragon-class monsters. Just thinking about it gives me the chills.

That's far away, though. Hmm, if I had to guess, I'd say I probably was in the upper strata before. If humans were able to get in and out, those tunnels must have been connected to the surface somehow. Aaaargh, why didn't I follow after those footsteps instead of running away! Although, really, even if I did manage to follow them out, I still look like this... Just because I'm a spider, I'd still have to live out my life hunting like a monster.

But yeah, that really has nothing to do with things right now, right? I've got to figure out how to escape these lower depths, after all... which would put me in the middle layers, huh. Really, though, I don't even know if this tunnel connects to the middle layers at all! Maaaan, I really want to avoid that lowest level.

Oh, another wasp died! It's not looking good for the wasps. Mantis, you're way strong! Hmm, isn't that thing way stronger than a snake? This is weird, I've been ranking the snakes as boss monsters... they don't even compare to that Earth Dragon, though, and if this praying mantis is so much stronger... The snake is plummeting down my rankings. This is pretty obvious, but... those snakes are nowhere near the toughest things on this level, are they?

Well, it's far too early to tell. It could be that the praying mantis is just way too strong.

...That is also a thought that needs correcting. Immediately after the third wasp was slain, something entirely unexpected happened to the praying mantis. In the blink of an eye, it was crushed between the mandibles of a giant spider.

Uh? Wait, wait... Seriously?

Greater Taratekt – LV 18 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Whoa. Is this what my Mega Evolution looks like? Really?

Greater Taratekt: *The evolved form of the spider-type monsters known as Taratekt. Their powerful, carnivorous fangs drip with deadly venom.*

Ohhhh! If I keep evolving, it that what I'll become!? It's still really small compared to "My Mother", that super-huge spider I saw way back when, but this thing is seriously over ten meters long! That praying mantis looks tiny now. ...Wait, was that thing taken down without the use of silk at all? Just with a bite? Wouldn't that require a stupidly high offense stat? Mine's still only 21! How many times am I going to have to evolve to turn into that thing...

Well, I should probably sneak away before I get spotted. Noooo way I can win against something like that.

Alright, I've learned one thing today: these lower depths are seriously bad news!! Why do I say that, you ask? It's pretty obvious!! All these monsters around me are so powerful that I don't even know if making a nest will be enough to beat them. Like I said before, Stealth is the last thread I'm clinging to. Was I too quick to flee, huh? Should I have seriously tried blasting through that swarm of wasps to get out of here, huh? Maaaaan, though, I'm not really feeling that sense of overwhelming doom like I was when that Earth Dragon was nearby, huh...

Although, I do know that there's monsters down here that the bees actually can kill, so maybe this isn't completely hopeless after all. Praying mantises and giant spiders are one

thing, but the other monsters down here can't all be that strong, right? If I find a monster that I think I can take, I'll make a meal out of it, otherwise I'll just keep using Stealth to sneak by. By the way, my red status gauge hasn't dropped at all! If I can trust this display, I don't need to worry too much about food for the time being. I should be able to pick my targets freely, acting with the utmost caution. I don't want to blunder across anything else like the Earth Dragon, after all.

Side Story 6: Stats

The vast assembly hall stretches before me as I pass through the door. At the end of a long, red carpet, a man waits behind a pedestal, while a crowd of people watches us quietly from their rows of seats along the walls. Everyone in the audience is a high-ranking member of the nobility.

Sue and I proceed forth along the red carpet, walking majestically like we had been taught for this occasion. I can feel the pressure of every eye in the audience as they watch us, but I ignore it as best as I can.

After what feels like a lifetime, we stop before the pedestal, then kneel. The man behind the pedestal, who is in reality our father, the King Majus Delua Analeicht, turns to face us.

“Let us commence the rite of Appraisal,” intones the King, his majestic voice reverberating through the hall.

This man may be my father, but I haven’t met him more than a few times, so he does not feel very much like a family member. Instead, he gives off an air of a powerful ruler. It would be a serious understatement to say I’m nervous right now. The King has been continuing to speak, but I’ve barely heard a word he’s said.

“...Slaine Zagan Analeicht, rise.” “Yes, my Lord,” I reply, rising to my feet. “Begin the Appraisal.”

I step up onto the small stool in front of the pedestal. With my height, I wouldn’t have been able to reach the top without the stool to help. Set within the pedestal is a flawless black gem. This seems to be the Gem of Appraisal, but it’s smaller than I thought it was going to be, small enough to fit in an adult’s palm. I shake off my unexpected thoughts and place my hand on the gem. I concentrate on the word “Appraise”, just like I had been taught. In an instant, my stats are revealed.

Statistics:

HP: 35/35 (green)

MP: 348/348 (blue)

SP: 35/35 (yellow), 35/35 (red)

Avg. Offense: 20

Avg. Defense: 20

Avg. Magic Power: 314

Avg. Resistance: 299

Avg. Speed: 20

Skills:

[Mana Perception (LV 8)] • [Mana Manipulation (LV 8)] • [Battle Magic (LV 6)] • [Mana Allocation (LV 5)] • [Offensive Magic (LV 3)] • [Accelerated MP Recovery (LV 7)] • [MP Consumption Reduction (LV 2)] • [Sword Skill (LV 3)] • [Destruction Enhancement (LV 2)] • [Battle Spirit (LV 2)] • [Willpower Allocation (LV 1)] • [Concentration (LV 5)] • [Aiming (LV 1)] • [Evasion (LV 1)] • [Enhanced Vision (LV 4)] • [Enhanced Hearing (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Smell (LV 2)] • [Enhanced Taste (LV 1)] • [Enhanced Touch (LV 1)] • [Life (LV 5)] • [Mana Pool (LV 8)] • [Alacrity (LV 5)] • [Endurance (LV 5)] • [Strength (LV 5)] • [Toughness (LV 5)] • [Magic Power (LV 8)] • [Resistance (LV 7)] • [Speed (LV 5)] • [Aegis of the Heavens] • [n % I = W]

Skill points available: 100,000

My stats appear in my mind's eye. Simultaneously, they are also projected high on the wall, like a screen, for the entire room to see. This screen is linked together with the Gem of Appraisal, so results can be displayed easily.

The crowd behind me begins to murmur. The King commands everyone to be silent, but the talking still continues. Based on that reaction alone, it looks like my stats are outside the norm. Quite honestly, this is the reaction I had been expecting.

My magic-related stats are, of course, quite high, as Anna could attest. In contrast, though, my physical stats are about where they should be for a child my age. Well, that's not quite accurate; they're definitely on the high side compared to my peers, but nowhere near the same extent as my magic stats. Hmm, my stats have become really unbalanced.

As for my skills, though, I know that there's some sort of Voice of God. If I understand it correctly, alerts you whenever your level rises or you gain a new skill. However, I have two skills that I wasn't told of at all: "Aegis of the Heavens" and one whose name looks garbled. I'm a little curious about both of those, so I try Appraising them.

Aegis of the Heavens: *Blessed by the protection of Heaven. Any outcome you desire is made easier to obtain.*

n % I = W: Impossible to appraise.

What the hell? Aegis of the Heavens is amazing. It's OP! Although, it does only say "easier to obtain", so it's not like the world will move exactly as I wish. This is an amazing skill, but I shouldn't lean on it too heavily.

The other skill, though, is much stranger. Not only is its name cryptic, the appraisal result is even worse! I have no idea what this skill could possibly be. Even a Gem of Appraisal of the highest quality can't glean any insight as to what this might be and, if Appraisal can't tell me anything, I have no idea how to explore it any further. I know nothing about this at all.

"Oh, that looks just like the one the Duke's daughter has!" says someone in the crowd. "That amazing prodigy, right?" asks someone else. "Yes," adds a third, "but it would appear that the Prince is just as talented... maybe even moreso!"

I've been catching snippets of conversation from the murmuring nobles behind me, usually comparing me to the daughter of a Duke. Is there seriously another child out there who is as gifted as I am? I thought Sue was the only one...

“Silence!!” thunders the King. The room quiets down immediately. The King presents me with a sheet of paper, on which my stats have been recorded by the magical writing device linked with the Gem of Appraisal. I respectfully accept it, bow deeply, and step back. My part of this ceremony is complete.

Next, Sue steps forward. Her results are roughly the same as mine, which causes the crowd to erupt into noise once more. The important difference, though, is that Sue lacks both the Aegis of the Heavens and that mystery skill.

Chapter 46: The Law of the Jungle, or so I thought...

I stealthily move along. If I kept watching these guys fight, after all, I'd definitely have gotten dragged into it, so getting out of there immediately was the best idea. Maaaan, these lower levels... That praying mantis... I thought it was ridiculously strong, but it's really just kind of average down here. There's not only the spider that devoured the mantis, but also winged lions and even a giant serpent that is probably the evolved form of one of those snakes from earlier. Truly, a peerless collection of monsters. No waaaaay.

I've been sneaking along, trying to avoid drawing attention to myself, and so far I've been able to slip past everything without being detected. Well, if I had been detected, it would have been all over, anyway.

For a while, I forced myself to keep moving constantly, not even stopping for sleep. After a while, my red stamina meter finally started to decrease again. I still have no idea what was keeping it maxed out before, but it seems like there's some kind of time limit on whatever it was. Before these thirty-eight points disappear, I'm definitely going to need find myself some food.

I couldn't find a target that I could actually defeat, though, so I tried to force myself to sleep. Let's be clear. I couldn't sleep at all. Obviously. Before, I could guarantee my safety while sleeping by building a basic home and sleeping in there. In a monster lair like this, though, I'd need more than just a basic home to guarantee my safety and, of course, anything more sturdily built would be way more conspicuous. I don't want to stand out at all.

If you have to ask me why, it's that the Earth Dragon is terrifying. If I build a decent nest, the Earth Dragon is probably going to come straight for me. What's that? I have a persecution complex? I don't know... The Earth Dragon is terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. Nope, nuh uh, no can do.

And, so, for the first time in my life, I slept without the comfort of a home. This was waaaay too stressful! Until I tried it, I never could have imagined sleeping in the open was going

to be so terrifying. Every time I started to nod off, the slightest sound would shock me awake, and then I'd start to nod off again. I got basically no decent sleep like that. Next time, I'm going to make a simple home, just for the peace of mind. It's not bad now, but if I wind up super sleep-deprived, something bad might happen. Ah, well, in my previous life I only really got four hours of sleep a day, so this might be okay after all.

Well, that's just my sleep problems. The real issue is food. I need to find a way to secure some food in this monster lair. This might be me being overly enthusiastic, but I think there's a simple enough way to make this happen. After all, there's a kind of food that I can obtain without breaking a sweat.

I thought it was a little odd, earlier. The strength of the monsters here is ridiculous! But, mixed in with those are some monsters that are way weaker, comparatively, the kinds that I saw back in the upper levels. Take the snake, for example. Ahaha, I never thought I'd be calling the snake weak!

Well, if there's weaker monsters, what do they eat? After all, the weak don't eat, they get eaten. That's the law of the jungle, and this dungeon follows it to the letter. But there's a tiny stream of weak things down here, the kinds of things that the wasps focus on as their main target.

So, after spending some time observing these weaker monsters, I've realized the common thread between all of them.

They're all extremely poisonous.

It's so obvious once you realize it. I was born with a little bit of Poison Resistance skill, so I didn't mind eating poisonous meat very much, but an ordinary person wouldn't want to eat poison! These guys might be weak, but any stronger monsters that don't have poison resistance would avoid eating them. This might even work in my favor; if I get spotted, they might leave me alone because of my poison! Well, I say that, but it's really better not to be spotted to begin with, so I really should keep sneaking around.

So, what do these weak monsters eat? There's two kinds of food, as far as I can tell. The first is, of course, other weak monsters. This is the big one. The weak monsters have to compete with other weak monsters. If I stumble across one, and I know there's no weak monsters nearby, I can easily finish one off with a sneak attack.

The other one... well, it's what the weak monsters eat when there's literally no other choice.

Elro Gelraish – LV3 – (*failed to appraise status*)

These things look like flat, black bugs that somehow remind me of snails. They cling to the dungeon walls and slowly creep along them, exactly like a snail. Let's call them... snail-bugs. These snail-bugs are abundant down here. No matter where you look, you'll see at least one, stuck to a wall. That's how many there are. After learning about these things, I foolishly wondered why none of the other monsters were eating snail-bug when they were so omnipresent.

This was before I actually ate one.

Yep, that was foolish. My mind was made up, fighting this thing was inevitable and, well, this isn't the kind of thing I can take back. It was only after I ate it that I realized why the other monsters used it as an absolute last resort.

Yep, I ate one. I really ate one. Killing it was easy; I yanked it off the wall with a thread and finished it off immediately with Poison Fang. I had yet to uncover its true horror, however. “Time to dig in,” I blithely thought. Ugh, why did I do that?

Snail-bugs are un-freaking-believably disgusting.

So, yeah! That taste was not of this mortal world! Sure, I've eaten a ton of rather gross things since I was reincarnated as a spider, but those flavors pale in comparison. It was so disgusting that I lost a few points of health! That was not food. My Decay Resistance skill went up! Under any sane criteria this is not a good thing for your food to do! If “waste not, want not” wasn't such a deeply-held personal belief, I wouldn't have taken another bite.

So, as you can see, there is food that I can easily obtain without breaking a sweat... but it comes bundled with such extreme pain. Well, if I had to pick between starving to death and eating food that merely makes me wish I was dead, I'd have to pick the option that doesn't involve actually dying. So, if I am out of literally every other option, I've got snail-bugs to eat. Let's pray it does not come down to that.

Chapter 47: Torrents of Toxin

Another day after another day of sneakily, sneakily scuttling along. The labyrinthine zone from the upper area had a billion twisty little passages, but this has just been one long, unbroken passage. I mean, it's great that I can't get lost, but... if this passage happens to connect to the lowest levels, I'd be stuck, right...? Aaagh, let's not start imagining the worst. This road leads to the middle layers! Yes! I believe this completely!

Well then, my red meter's about to run out. I... did eat one of those snail-bugs earlier, but that is really, really an absolute last resort. Even now, I can see a few of them crawling around on the walls, but I can't really imagine myself willingly eating any of them. That's right! These things are that atrociously awful to eat.

So, while I've still got a few points left in this meter, I should try to find a more normal meal. ...Let's not worry about whether highly poisonous monsters are "normal" or not. Ah, well, it's not like I haven't eaten a bunch of them already... Ugh, and now there's these guyyys... Why can't I find something tasty for oonce! I really miss instant ramen.

Right, right! Front: clear! Rear: clear! Perimeter is clear of external threat! Perfect, perfect.

Elro Randanel – LV 8 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Elro Randanel – LV 7 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Elro Randanel – LV 7 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Look at that, they're in a group of three, just like last time! What a friendly bunch. Their levels are way higher than the last group, though, as expected for things down in these lower levels. That level eight one might even level up soon, if level ten's their evolution threshold. Ah, what a bright future... that they will never see, heh.

I circle around behind them, hidden in the gloom. And then I deploy my brand-new weapon: a throwing net!! ...Huh? The name's kind of boring? Haha, it's fine, it's fine. Sometimes nothing really clever comes to mind, you know! "Silken Smasher" made me

grin as soon as I thought of it, but coming up with names of that caliber every single time would be a huge pain!

So, without further ado, throwing net: GO!

Please do not be mistaken: this is no ordinary throwing net. This new weapon... argh, this really does need a name, hm... oh, what? An explanation? Right, right! This net collapses into a ball as I throw it, then springs open wide as soon as it reaches its target! This is my amazing new combination attack, mixing the precise craftsmanship of my Spider Silk and the dextrous control of my Thread Manipulation.

All three of them are wrapped up tightly in an instant! Ha ha hah! A great catch, a great catch! Now, as usual, let's end things with a little Poison Fang... *chomp*!

“You have earned the title [Poison User], and have been awarded the skills [Poison Synthesis (LV 1)] and [Poison Magic (LV 1)].”

Oh? Ohhhh?! I got another tiiiitllllllle!! It's a poison one? It's a poison one!! Man, I have been using nothing but poison since I was born, and this is only finally showing up? These must be some strict requirements! Hm, now that I think about it, though, all of my titles have had some pretty harsh entry conditions... maybe they're just hard to earn in general? Ah, well, I've got this one now so it's not a problem.

Now, the skills, “Poison Synthesis” and “Poison Magic”, huh... Well, I'm going to just ignore Poison Magic because I still have absolutely no idea how to use it at all. Throw it on the magical garbage heap I'm accumulating. Poison Synthesis, hmm, might share the same fate. How do I use this thing? “Synthesis” huh, so, do I use this to make poison? I'm a spider, though, I can make my own poison already.

Ah, no, no, let's not waste time messing with my skills. I still have work to do! There are still two more of these things that need to be disposed of. So, with my Poison Fangs... *chomp*!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Fang (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8.”

Oh? Ohhh?! OHHHHH?! What's today's forecast, poison with a chance of more poison? This is great, this is great! If level ten is the maximum skill level, my poison should be getting way stronger now that it's at level eight. It already could take down those wasps, who I assume were venomous themselves. This is way easier than getting titles, hah.

Right. Let's take these three dead things and hide amongst the crags. Ergh, man, with my terrible physical stats, carrying three of these at once is extremely difficult! Man, if I'd carried these things one at a time, I might have had an easier time but... huh? Didn't I complain about this exact same problem a while ago, you ask? Didn't I come up with exactly the same solution the last time, you ask? Hmmmm? I know nothing about anything like that! I don't remember that at all, and my memory is nowhere close to bad, so it can't have happened. You got that? Good.

Well, while I'm stuck here eating, I might as well play around with Poison Synthesis some. Of course, I have no real clues about how to begin, so, uh... I'm basically just going to take a wild guess. So, deep in my heart, I silently whisper, “Poison Synthesis.”

Huh, and something actually popped into my head. Just like with Appraisal, I can see a status window floating in my mind's eye.

Poison Synthesis Menu:

Weak Poison

Spider Venom (LV 8)

What the heck? Oh, well, if it's displayed like this, let's try using Appraisal to read up on it...

Poison Synthesis Menu: From here, you may synthesize poison.

Weak poison: An extremely weak poison.

Spider Venom (LV 8): A lethal venom secreted by spiders. At level 8, it is extremely potent.

Umf. “Spider Venom” is undoubtedly my own poison. This “Weak Poison”, is it what a level one Poison Synthesis can normally make? To try it out, I select Weak Poison. As I watch, a ball of liquid bubbles into being in mid-air, then suddenly drops to the ground with a splash. Whoops. I really should find a container for this, shouldn’t I? Just to be sure, I appraise the puddle.

Puddle of weak poison

Yeah, that’s weak poison, all right. I see... it looks like Poison Synthesis is a skill that can conjure up poison without needing any materials at all. If I was a human, this would be super useful, but I’m a spider, you know. Well, I might be able to come up with a use for it anyway. Yeah, a no-cost way of generating poison is pretty awesome, after all.

Ah, no, wait, my mana’s gone down a bit. Looks like it’s not completely free, after all. That’s another big strike against it. I guess that if I keep leveling it up I might gain access to a larger variety of poisons, but I’ve already got my super-powerful spider venom! This isn’t very appealing at all. I’m glad that I figured out how to use it, though. This is, at the very least, way more useful than the completely incomprehensible magic system.

Chapter 48: A fork in the... path?

After all this time following this long, dangerous tunnel through the lower depths, I've finally, finally, found it! A fork in the path! ...uh, the path?

Yeah. An impossibly large cavern stretches out into the distance before me. Here, the path forks... er, here, the path opens wide... uh, here, the path disappears...? If you asked me to tell you how big it is, I couldn't; even with my ultra-powerful night vision cutting effortlessly through the darkness, I can't see the other side.

Uhhhh... which way should I go now? I couldn't get lost while I was following a single straight line, but in this enormous, empty space, I'm kinda worried. It's kinda like... suddenly finding yourself in a desert with no path or landmarks to guide you. I don't even know which way I should be facing! This is dreadful.

I heard that if you keep constantly walking forward in a place where you the scenery doesn't change, you'll subconsciously wander in a huge arc and eventually wind up back where you started. Of course, I'm a spider, not a human, so I actually have no idea how true that is for me. There's not really much around here that I could use as a landmark, just crags and pillars scattered here and there. I can't really find anything unique about any of them, so using them as landmarks isn't really possible. There's snail-bugs around here, so even in the worst case scenario I'm not going to die of hunger, but there's going to be no way for me to notice if I'm getting lost.

Well, it's time once to break out the most basic maze-solving skill: follow the wall. I'll keep the wall on my right side as I advance.

But, man, this place is huge. It's not just extremely broad, horizontally, but it's ridiculously tall as well! The pillars holding up the ceiling have to be over a hundred meters tall. What spectacular height. Even though I'm still stuck in this dungeon, I don't feel like I'm cooped up anymore. How do I say this... even though there's nothing here but rock, this cavern exemplifies the glory of Mother Nature. In here, I am reminded of how small I truly am.

In my previous life, I saw a TV show that talked about the unexplored parts of the world. Honestly, I can't say that I felt moved at all when I was watching it back then. No matter how beautiful the images on the screen were, in the end they were just figments of a distant world that had absolutely nothing to do with me. I felt no excitement, no wonder; just indifference. I honestly don't even know why I was watching it.

But now, I'm here. This is the world I'm living in. This isn't irrelevant. I can't be indifferent! Being this moved by my surroundings is something I had never experienced when I was a human. I probably wouldn't have ever been able to come here, too, if I had kept myself cooped up in the nest I called my home. I really should thank that pyromaniac human for forcing me out into the outside world.

...Ah, but even just thinking about it still makes me mad. Yeah, right. Like there's any way I could be grateful to a jerk like that. Next time I meet him, I'll roll him up nice and tight in my silk, drag him around the dungeon for a while, and then finish him off with a Poison Fang.

Hoooof. That's an unpleasant memory to drag up. Let's put that aside, gaze once more at the grandeur of nature, and be calmed.

Bagragrach — LV 14 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

A giant monster lumbers into view. From its build and attitude, it looks kinda slow and lazy, and a little bit stupid too... but that mouth shatters that impression immediately. That giant, crocodile-like mouth, bursting with countless jagged teeth. The monkey-like body attached to that terrible maw looks kind of unbalanced, but brutal.

This isn't calming at aaaaall...

Yeah, that's right. This is a dungeon. This isn't nature; this is danger. Comprende? Yeah.

And, so, I slip away into the murk and make my escape.

Somehow, I made it out without being seen. You know, I just had a really terrible thought, that I really wish I didn't have. Could this enormous cavern be, uh, could it maybe be the bottom-most layer?

I don't really know how far apart layers are supposed to be, but it's not unthinkable that I could have gone down a level while following that extremely long road. With such a long, straight tunnel, if it had just a tiny little slope to it, I could easily have gone up or down a fair way without noticing anything at all. It's a possibility, right...?

No, no, no. It can't be, right? That's just an ordinary huge cavern. Yeah. Or maybe it's part of the middle layers! Aha, let's go with that! These are definitely the middle layers! Haha, oh man, it was way easier to get out of the lower levels than I had expected!

Bagragrach – LV 8 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Bagragrach – LV 4 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Bagragrach – LV 11 – (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Man, what are these guys doing in the middle layer? I make like the Invisible Man... wait, no, the Invisible Spid... ah, forget it. I sink into the shadows and sneakily scuttle away.

After I put a bunch of distance between me and them, I remember that I haven't actually gotten around to appraising their species yet.

Bagragrach: *A monster with a giant, deformed jaw. They work together, bringing down their pray as a pack.*

Uh-huh... so they're not just strong, they hunt in packs, huh... I've really got no chance, huh...

Yyeah. It's starting to look like this isn't the middle layer after all. How could it be, with this kind of difficulty level? Ugh. I really, really hope this isn't the bottom layer.

Chapter 49: Hey, Appraisal, I guess you're OP after all

I move stealthily, keeping close to the wall. So, ever since I ate those three monsters a little while ago, my red stamina meter has once again gotten stuck at its maximum value. Hmm? Sure, it was a lot of food; eating just one of those things was almost enough to max me out, but... Now that I think about it, could this maybe be the result of my Overeating skill? If I eat more than I need, does the excess get stockpiled somewhere? This effect did start happening after I acquired that skill, after all... Hmm, this doesn't seem like such a wild guess.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

Oh? OH?! OHHHH?!?! Appraisal!! Miss Appraisal, you came!! What a glorious day!

Is it okay if I get my hopes up a bit, since you got way more awesome last time? It's okay, right? You wouldn't let me down, right? We've cleared that hurdle already, getting this high, right? You're not going to crash into it, right? Now, the results are...?!

Small Taratekt – LV 3 – (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 38/38 (green)

MP: 38/38 (blue)

SP: 38/38 (yellow), 38/38 (red)

Avg. Offense: 21

Avg. Defense: 21

Avg. Magic Power: 19

Avg. Resistance: 19

Avg. Speed: 369

Skills:

[Automatic HP Recovery (LV 2)] • [Poison Fang (LV 8)] • [Poison Synthesis (LV 1)] • [Spider Silk (LV 8)] • [Thread Manipulation (LV 5)] • [Throw (LV 1)] • [Concentration (LV 1)] • [Aiming (LV 1)] • [Appraisal (LV 7)] • [Detection (LV 3)] • [Stealth (LV 5)] • [Corruption Magic (LV 2)] • [Shadow Magic (LV 1)] • [Poison Magic (LV 1)] • [Overeating (LV 3)] • [Night Vision (LV 10)] • [Visible Spectrum Expansion (LV 1)] • [Poison Resistance (LV 7)] • [Paralysis Resistance (LV 3)] • [Petrification Resistance (LV 2)] • [Acid Resistance (LV 3)] • [Decay Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fear Resistance (LV 5)] • [Ignore Pain] • [Pain Tolerance (LV 5)] • [Strength (LV 2)] • [Toughness (LV 2)] • [Kartikeya (LV 2)] • [Taboo (LV 2)] • [n % I = W]

Eh? Really? Seriously?! I'm not seeing things, right?! Oh. Oh! Ohh! WHOOOOOAAHHHHH?! Skills!! My skills showed up!! Miss Appraisal, you do excellent work! You cleared that hurdle splendidly! Yahoo! You're really making something of yourself!

Appraisal, you're seriously amazing! Thank you so much. Seriously, thank you! With this... with this, I can finally double-Appraise all of the skills I know nothing about and get a description! So... whoooo's... FIRST?!

Right, first up is Overeating, since I was just thinking about it.

Overeating: *A skill which makes it possible to eat beyond one's normal capacity. The stamina that would have been gained from the extra food is stockpiled for future use; however, this causes the user to become fat. As the level increases, the amount that may be stockpiled increases.*

Ah, aaaah... Oh ho! It's just as I thought! In other words, it's a skill that, after I eat a ton, stops my Stamina from going down for a while. I'll get fat, though, huh? Am... am I fat?! I don't know how I feel about that. I mean, I'm a spider, so is it really that bad? If I were human, of course, it would be a huge drawback.

Next is... this, I guess!

Strength: *A skill which applies an increase to your physical offensive capabilities, proportionate to its level.*

Huh. Is that what that is? Just a basic stat-boosting skill. Oh that's right, after I leveled up, this skill leveled up too. When I leveled up my offensive power went up by 2 instead of 1 like some of my other stats did; maybe that's thanks to this skill. So that must mean...

Toughness: *A skill which applies an increase to your physical defensive capabilities, proportionate to its level.*

Aha, just as I thought, this skill's the defensive version of Strength. Um, the effect might be a little weak, but since my stats are such garbage, I'll take every tiny little boost I can get.

Let's keep going! Next is... this one, that I've never seen before. It's level two, so it must have leveled up at some point... did I miss something the "Voice of Heaven" said?

Kartikeya: *A skill which applies an increase to your speed, proportionate to one hundred times its level. In addition, when leveling up, this skill increases your base Speed statistic by ten times the level of this skill.*

Huh? Ahh... uh... huh? Ah... is that why my speed was so ridiculously fast, huh... right... right... WHAAAAAAAT?!

Wh... what the heck is this ridiculous skill? I thought for sure that my entire species was this fast, but it was this?! Whoa. Kartikeya... is this the special privilege of a transmigrated soul?! Oh! Is that it?! Thank the gods! An amazing rare skill, bestowed upon me at birth? Transmigration privilege is awesome! I didn't earn the nickname Kartikeya in that MMO for nothing! Hee! I'm getting pretty hype!

Now... what's this other skill I haven't seen before?

n % I = W: Impossible to appraise.

Uh? “Impossible to appraise”? What the heck? ...Huh. After all that, a fumble. Well... just from the name, this kinda looks like a bug. I don’t really like not knowing what it is, but if I can’t Appraise it I guess it can’t really be helped. I just hope it doesn’t have a detrimental effect, that’s all.

I take a moment to collect my thoughts, then check the next skill.

Taboo: A skill earned by breaking taboos. You must not raise this skill.

Whoa. This is a profoundly mysterious description. It seems kinda obvious, though, that this is some kind of penalty, like a curse. Ugh, I don’t want this. “You must not raise this skill,” it says, but it’s already level 2... Seriously? Maaaan... that killed my hype.

Chapter 50: Mahou Shoujo Magical Kumoko☆

Automatic HP Recovery: Gradually restores lost HP. Allows for recovery of injuries that would not heal naturally.

Poison Fang: Grants the Poison attribute to the user's bite attack.

Poison Synthesis: Consumes MP to customize and purify poisons. The kinds of poison that may be synthesized are dependent on skill level. Available poisons: Weak Poison (LV 1)

Spider Silk: A unique skill possessed only by spiders and spider-like organisms. Produces customizable silk threads. Attributes available to customize: adhesion, elasticity, resilience, texture, strength, and size.

Thread Manipulation: Allows the user to freely manipulate thread.

Throw: When throwing something, increases the strength and accuracy of the throw.

Concentration: Increases the ability to concentrate.

Aiming: Increases the user's accuracy rate, in every circumstance.

Appraisal: Displays information about various things.

Detection: A composite skill that encompasses every perception skill in the system. Skills included: Mana Perception, Spell Pattern Perception, Material Perception, Presence Detection, Danger Sense, Motion Detection, Thermal Perception, Reaction Detection, and Spatial Perception.

Stealth: Conceals the user's presence.

Night Vision: Provides a sense of sight even when no light sources exist.

Visible Spectrum Expansion: Widens the band of frequencies that the user is capable of perceiving.

Poison Resistance: Increases the user's defense against the Poison attribute.

Paralysis Resistance: Increases the user's defense against the Paralysis attribute.

Petrification Resistance: Increases the user's defense against the Petrification attribute.

Acid Resistance: Increases the user's defense against the Acid attribute.

Decay Resistance: Increases the user's defense against the Decay attribute.

Fear Resistance: Stifles feelings of terror.

Ignore Pain: Completely negates the restrictive effects of pain on the user's mind and body.

Pain Tolerance: Lessens the sense of pain, while preserving the sense of danger pain would ordinarily provide.

I appraise the remaining skills in one go. Generally, everything's as I thought it was going to be, but there was a bit of new information in there as well.

The “Visible Spectrum Expansion” skill, for instance, has finally been explained. This will let me see infrared and ultraviolet radiation... right? I can't really see anything, though... Oh, I guess I only have one level in it, so it's not going to do all that much. It's also totally possible that there isn't much infrared or ultraviolet radiation bouncing around inside a dungeon. Well, it hasn't been bothering me so far, so I guess I don't really care!

I also analyzed the various attributes in the resistance system, and, uh, found something kinda terrible. Most of the attributes are pretty much exactly what they say on the box, but... one of them doesn't really quite match up.

Decay Attribute: *Encompasses the breakdown and collapse of matter, such as that associated with death.*

What the heck? Scary. I thought it was just a skill that made it okay for me to eat meat that was a little rotten, but this is a really weird attribute. My Decay Resistance went up when I ate one of those snail-bugs... do they have this attribute? Whoa. That... explains that terrible, unearthly taste. Ugh. Eating those things is absolutely the last resort.

The next thing that I got curious about was Detection. It's way, way more high-power than I had originally thought. "Every perception skill in the system"? Shouldn't I have had to spend more than just 100 points on that? Can I use them one at a time? Noooope. Man, seriously, I want to figure out what each one of these things does individually, but it looks like I have to activate everything simultaneously. My options are "on" and "off", nothing for the individual skills. I really want to use "Presence Detection" and "Danger Sense", but when everything is activated simultaneously I can't tell the bits of information I want from all the rest of the information that's coming in.

There's no way my tiny little brain can process all of that; if I try, a headache will be the least of my worries. On top of that, when I turned it on just to test it a little while, the level went up again! Now it assaults me with even more useless information! Until I find a skill that makes my brain work better, I can't use this at all. This skill is awesome because it's so high-power... but it's also basically impossible to use.

'Twas caviar to the general, pearls cast before swine, Detection for a spider. Ugh.

Well, onto the last thing, the skills that have the highest chance of having their true potential unlocked through Appraisal: my three magic skills. The skills that I've had to leave aside all this time because I had no idea how to use them. The skills that would be infinitely more useful if I knew how they worked. If I knew that, I'd be able to truly call myself a magician. Yeah! Appraisal, if you would?!

Corruption Magic: Magic that directly affects the soul. The spells that may be cast are dependent on skill level. Available spells: *Disquiet* (LV 1), *Phantom Pain* (LV 2)

Shadow Magic: A low-rank Darkness magic that manipulates shadows. The spells that may be cast are dependent on skill level. Available spells: *Deep Shadow* (LV 1)

Poison Magic: Magic that manipulates poison. The spells that may be cast are dependent on skill level. Available spells: *Poison Touch* (LV 1)

Oh? Ohh? Hmm... Questionable. Well, don't get me wrong, compared to when I knew absolutely nothing this is a night-and-day difference... but I still have no idea how to use it. Corruption Magic... these are mind-affecting spells, right? Shadow and Poison... well, they're pretty obvious. Some of these even look like they might be useful even at level one! They might be useful... but how the heck do I activate them? Should I just try doing it like I did with Appraisal, just kinda chanting the name to myself.

Right. Now then... *Disquiet*!

...

Nothing happened. Ah, well, maybe it was a misfire because I didn't aim it at a target. Let's try a different spell. *Deep Shadow*!

...

Nothing there either. *Poison Touch*!

...

Nothing's happening! My mana isn't even being drained. Forget misfiring or targeting errors, I don't think I'm even firing anything to begin with. Seriouslyyyyyy. I got my hopes up a little, but I guess it was useless after all. Ah, wait up a bit? Maybe if I try appraising "magic" by itself, it'll give me a little hint...?

Magic: A phenomenon where a user may channel mana through a skill, producing an effect.“

Yeeep, no good after all. Uuughhh, I still can't use any magic!! Well, shit. My magical-girl debut as "Mahou Shoujo Magical Kumoko"¹ is still a long ways away, isn't it. Fuck.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. Literally, “Magical Girl: Magical Spider-Girl”. I left this relatively untranslated because a lot of anime titles like that have been left untranslated.

Side Story 7: The Duke's Daughter

The Appraisal ceremony finished without a hitch, apart from that little commotion. It seems that what had everyone talking wasn't just the fact that Sue's stats and mine were both abnormally high. Thanks to my enhanced sense of hearing, I was able to eavesdrop a little on the nobles' discussions. It seems that skill points are normally only supposed to be granted when you level up, so starting with a hundred thousand at level one isn't normal at all. Sue, now that I think about it, has zero. I'd bet that this is because I've reincarnated, but what's interesting is that I keep overhearing that "the duke's daughter" also was born with skill points.

From what these nobles are saying, it sounds like the duke's daughter was Appraised a few days ago. They found that not only did she have phenomenally high stats, she also had skill points she wasn't supposed to. On top of that, they're saying that she also has the same skill with the strange, glitchy name that I do.

I come to a sudden realization: if what I'm hearing is correct, I absolutely must meet this daughter of a duke. My chance, luckily, arrived quickly.

After the Appraisal ceremony, we were led to a different assembly hall, where a small party was being held. Accompanied by the king, we went to meet a group of young nobles that had lined up in the center of the room. These children are generally around my age or slightly older; it seems that this is a way for the younger generation of the nobility to introduce themselves to each other. There, I got a chance to meet the duke's daughter.

"It is a great pleasure to meet you, my lord. I am the daughter of the Duke of Anabald, Carnatia Seli Anabald," she says.

She is beautiful, with bright red hair like a raging flame and a fierce face that reveals her strong-willed disposition. Her presence captivates the attention with just a single glance. Not only that, I can see through my Mana Perception the huge mass of magical energy that billows around her. She has as much as Sue and I do.

The Duke of Anabald, incidentally, is among the country's most renowned members of the aristocracy. House Anabald has served the country for many generations, and their proud lineage has produced royalty and heroes. Every child born to the House of Anabald is supremely gifted, and their talents are finely honed by rigorous education so that they may be raised as the finest servants of their country.

Even so, the girl before me is abnormal. She seems to have already surpassed her father, the red-haired man who stands next to her.

“Greetings,” I reply, “I am Slaine Zagan Analeicht. *Nice to meet you.*”

To test my realization from earlier, I said the last part in Japanese. For an instant, her eyes went wide, and I knew at once that I had been completely right.

“Father, may I speak with this girl?” I ask. “Eh?” replies the king.

He seems a little puzzled by my actions. The duke and his daughter, after all, were at the head of a long line of other children, brought in to meet me. However, I couldn’t let this chance slip past me.

“Should I not?” “Hmm...“

The king glances at me, then at the duke, then at the other nobles still waiting in line, contemplating his options. Finally, he opens his mouth to speak.

“I don’t mind. Don’t be gone for too long. Come back in a little while.” “Yes, Father. Thank you.”

I grab the duke’s daughter’s hand and run off, like a little kid. Behind me, Sue started sulking incredibly, but I paid it no mind.

We left the assembly hall and found a private chamber off of the waiting room. Rooms such as these were set up near the assembly halls so that any nobles who needed to slip away to conduct private transactions could do so. This room is tightly soundproofed, and a guard

stationed at the door outside adds additional security. “Ahh, this’ll do,” I say, talking in Japanese now that I have nothing to hide.

“I would have never guessed that the prince would seriously be another reincarnated person!” says the duke’s daughter, also speaking in Japanese. “Oh maaan, it’s been so long since I heard Japanese coming out of another person’s mouth! I’m getting a little emotional here.” She still looks as strong-willed as ever, but her tone is light.

“So, I’d like to know... do you remember Heishin High?” I ask, referring to my old school.

“Holy crap, yeah! We’re seriously both from the same school and reincarnated in this world, huh?”

As I feared, this young woman was, just like me, caught up in that mysterious mid-air crack in the classroom and transported here; a former classmate.

“My old name was Shunsuke Yamada,” I say. “What was yours?” “Bwha?!” As soon as I say my old name, her eyes practically fly out of their sockets. “Ahahahaha! H... hahaha! Y... you’re... Shun! Shun, a prince, haha, as fucking iiiif!”

The young woman lets out an enormous roar of laughter. What’s with this *deja vu*? The girl in front of me looks nothing like anyone I know, but this style of speech, these mannerisms, I remember them.

“Are you... no way, are you Kanata?” I ask, incredulously. “Yeah!”

Now it’s my turn to laugh. Kanata, the guy I used to play games with all the time, my best friend, is now a young woman. I don’t know if it would have been possible for him to have been reincarnated as anything less like his old self.

“Man, don’t laugh! I was seriously depressed about this for a while after I was reborn, you know?” “Ahaaa, my bad. You were laughing at me just now though! Let’s call it even.” “Yeah. I’m so glad I met you again, though! It’s been rough so far, dealing with this all on my own.” “Ahh, yeah, I totally understand. I’m glad we met too.”

Kanata and I bump fists.

Immediately, an ear-splitting sound roars through the soundproofed door. “What the?!” yells Kanata, panicking. I also panic for an instant, but as soon as I realize who was on the other side, I calm down. Or, rather, I started panicking for a different reason.

With another roar, the door flies off its hinges and crashes into the room. On the other side, I see Sue, her body strengthened with Battle Magic and mana gathering in her fist for another strike. She peers at the two of us, then locks on to Kanata.

“Sue, no! Stop! Stop!!” I dive between them, just barely before Sue was going to blow Kanata to pieces.

Sue runs forward and clings to me tightly. “I won’t let anyone else have you,” she mumbles.

“Your sister’s scaaaary...” says Kanata, in Japanese.

On that day, I met my first classmate.

Chapter 51: Knowing your opponent's strengths, isn't that wonderful?

Invisibly, I lurk behind the rocks.

Elro Daznatch – LV 23

Statistics:

HP: 786/818 (green)

MP: 335/335 (blue)

SP: 779/779 (yellow), 723/781 (red)

Failed to appraise statistics.

A little ways away from the crags I'm currently hiding behind, this guy slowly creeps along. What... is... this thing? If I had to describe it, I'd say it's like... a really huge fish that grew arms and legs? Naaah, that's not quite it. I can't really pin down what I'm getting off of this mysterious life-form.

Well, I don't actually care about this strange and mysterious creature. Ah, no, I can't really say that I don't care. If it spots me, that would suck.

But before that, I have some extremely important news! Yes, the lovely Miss Appraisal has outdone herself once again: I can see my enemies' stats!! Sure, it might just be their health, mana, and stamina, but just that is amazing, right? The success rate isn't very good, though, since it hits maybe once for every three or four tries, but knowing even just a part of an opponents' stats is still huge!

Even with just a rough idea of my opponents' HP, MP, and SP values, I can still get a pretty decent grasp on how strong they are. So, if I see a huge difference in these values, I absolutely should not fight them. My strategy is self-preservation.

So, in the immediate future, fighting this mysterious life-form is out of the question. These stats are ridiculous, you know! 818 hit points? What the heck? If you hit that guy hard enough to kill me twenty times over, wouldn't it still have health left? This is inflation, right? Oh man, if this weird-looking thing with the stupid-looking face has stats like this, that Earth Dragon has to have 4-digit HP, doesn't it?

No waaaaay.

From what I've gathered so far in the last few days, monsters with levels higher than ten are all powerful. These things are what you'd call advanced monsters, I think, that don't have any evolution past level ten. So, if I see a monster of a species that can have levels greater than ten, I shouldn't engage it, even if its own level is less than ten. On the other hand, if I haven't seen a level ten-plus monster in a given species, then it's probably weak.

What was really shocking, though, was that even some of the small fry I've been hunting had crazy-high stats. Some of them even had triple-digit health! Seriouslyyy, I didn't know you guys were so strooong, and so on. For sure, fighting these things head-on would have been suicide. I've been betting everything on my surprise attacks: an entire battle decided in an instant.

Man, now that I think about it, these things I've been calling "small fry" are, uh, higher-rank than I am. Wow, my Spider Silk must be a really good skill, if it can immobilize these powerful foes without trouble at all. If it wasn't the case, then, well, I'd probably be dead by now, haha. Stats may be important, but skills are just as important too!

I really want to know what my opponent's skills are now... if I knew that, I'd have such a great edge in a fight. When it comes down to it, if you took my skills away from me I'd be left with only my speed. If you bring along fire to burn my webs and an antidote to nullify my poison fangs, my odds of winning drop to basically zero. Oh maaan, skill countermeasures suuuck. I fight someone with that level of preparation, I'm basically just straight-up dead!

Well, I don't really think the monsters down here are bright enough for that. That's why a weak little monster like me can survive down here. Intelligence is supreme! It's humanity's greatest strength.

Hmmm... humanity, though... I wonder how much of this dungeon humans have explored? The only time I've seen humans so far is when they showed up to burn down my nest. I've seen footprints, of course, but ever since I wound up in those labyrinthine tunnels, I haven't seen any. Hmm, if this is indeed the world's largest dungeon, maybe their exploration isn't making very much progress?

Now that I'm thinking about it, I'm able to eat the monsters down here while humans would have to bring in their own food. If you wanted to explore a huge dungeon like this, you'd need to carry around a huge pile of food. That's already a huge amount of physical labor required, and on top of that you'd need to fight off all of the monsters down here too. If you had a skill or spell that gave you, say, an inventory screen where you could store all of your stuff in a pocket dimension, that would be a little different, but food is still a pretty big limitation.

Based on this, I think human exploration efforts have probably been limited to the upper strata; and, on top of that, probably just a small section of it. If that's true, then it makes a lot of sense as to why I haven't seen very many footprints. If there's no footprints, it's out of the explorable range, right?

Hm? Wait a sec... the first set of footprints I found was... back where that huge spider was, in that area with those huge groups of strong-looking monsters? Whoa, that's in their exploration zone? Even though my mother's there? ...No way, can they defeat that thing?! No way!! If my guess is right, that thing's got to be about as strong as that Earth Dragon, right? They can defeat that thing?! It's not impossible? And if it's not impossible, then wouldn't that make humans crazy strong?

...I just had a really nasty thought. If humans are strong enough to take out my mother, then I should just avoid the outside world completely. No matter how hard I struggled, I wouldn't be able to survive. Living down here in the dungeon would be way easier.

Well, for now, let's just keep on struggling forward, trying to get back to the upper strata. Once I finally manage to get back there, I can find a place where humans won't go. Wait, no, even if it's kinda dangerous shouldn't I go find a human and Appraise his stats, just to be sure? Ah well, it's not like I'm in a huge hurry. I still have zero clue how to get back up there.

Chapter 52: Tie them up and cut them down

Sneak, sneak.

Left? *Clear!* Right? *Clear!* Target acquired, dead ahead!

Elro Kohokolo – LV 23

Statistics:

HP: 67/89 (green)

MP: 21/21 (blue)

SP: 79/79 (yellow), 54/85 (red)

Failed to appraise statistics.

Ahead of me is a monster that's kind of like a giant pillbug. Well, it's got the body of a pillbug, but its head looks more like a rat's. Is it an insect or a mammal? I want to know. Since it's pillbug-like, it's really likely that it curls up into an armored ball when it needs to defend itself. I fought a turtle monster before, and when it retreated into its shell I had a stupidly tough time with it. Well, if I get that pillbug wrapped up in my silk, it won't be able to curl itself into a ball.

Regardless: Set throwing nets on standby... take this!! Direct hit! Thread Manipulation will take care of the rest.

“You have earned the title [Silk User], and have been awarded the skills [Thread Manipulation (LV 1)] and [Severing Thread (LV 1)]. Your new skill, [Thread Manipulation (LV 1)], has been integrated with your existing skill, [Thread Manipulation (LV 5)], which has grown to level 6.”

Oh? Ohh?! I got another title!! “Silk User”, huh? This titillates my inner special snowflake.

Hey, pillbug, listen, something's come up, should we just wrap this up now? Does that sound like a plan? ...No? Too bad. So; Poison Fang, Poison Fang, drag you back behind a rock. Yep!

Now, let's get straight to figuring out what this new title does. For a title like Silk User, the requirements must be... using silk, right? Hm? Wellll, If that's the case, it's kinda weird that it's taken me this long to actually earn it. There's got to be some other requirement.

Well, I've got it already, so it actually really doesn't matter what the acquisition requirements are. I've got a better question: is this usable? This time, I'm confident: this title will be very useful. Ah, well, I mean, it bumped my Thread Manipulation level up, which is already huge! Day after day I've been focusing on grinding this thing out, so having it finally level up makes me so, so happy. Just from that alone, this title is worth something.

What's really caught my eye, though, is this other skill. "Severing Thread." Seriously, doesn't that sound like something a kid that's way into anime would come up with? But, is this it? A skill that lets me slash at my enemies with my threads?

It... it can't be!! Cut down by something I did not see... how?! What could have done this?! Urk... is... is this... thread?!

I can make a scene like that happen, right? Hehe. Yeaah. This is greeeat!

Well, special snowflake delusions aside, this is obviously a pretty decent boost to my combat abilities. The only real offensive attack I've had up until now was Poison Fang, but now, at long last, my number of usable attacks has increased to two. Furthermore, this is my silk, my main weapon!

Whoops, haha, I haven't even Appraised this or done any experimentation yet, I need to avoid getting ahead of myself here. First things first: Appraise.

Severing Thread: *Applies the slashing attribute to threads.*

Umf. It does what its name implies. I was seriously a little worried about what I would have done if it was something completely ridiculous instead.

Well, that's one worry down. The remaining questions are: can I apply this to my spider silk, can I actually figure out how to activate this skill, and how effective is this at level one...

You know what will come in handy right about now? That monster I just brought down. Come, pillbug, be my lab rat!

Step one, spin some silk. Crank the strength all the way up to maximum, drop the stickiness to zero. I swing it at the corpse of the pillbug while concentrating on the words “Severing Thread”. Oh! I definitely feel like it activated.

The thread glanced off of the pillbug’s body. Mmm. It’s level one, alright, I guess it can’t put out very much power? Ah, wait, it cut in a little bit! Isn’t this great for a level one skill? The other skills so far have been pretty terrible at level one, so the fact that this can take a piece out of the pillbug’s tough shell makes it a really amazing skill.

Which reminds me, what does this cost? Did it consume any mana? Hmm... my mana hasn’t gone down at all. My stamina... well, thanks to Overeating, my stamina isn’t going down at all so I can’t really tell if this had any impact. Keeping in mind Poison Synthesis, I don’t think that it’s possible for there to be anything that doesn’t consume something. So maybe if the actual red stamina gauge didn’t go down by a full point, something internally must have ticked down a little bit. But while I don’t know exactly how much this costs, the actual cost/performance ratio doesn’t seem that bad. On top of that, I’ve got Overeating keeping my red stamina gauge filled up, which makes this pretty convenient!

Next step is to see if I can use this with a sticky thread as well. Once again, I swing a thread at the pillbug. Hm? Hmm. I’m sure I activated it correctly, but it didn’t even leave a mark.

Well, that’s basically what I expected to have happen. From all of the experimentation I’ve done on my silk, I know that there are some limits on how far I can customize each strand. For instance, if I want to max out a thread’s stickiness, it’s really difficult to keep its

elasticity. It's not that it's impossible, though; it's just not really effective. It's like a thread has a number of points that I can assign to its attributes, and I have to distribute them based on what I want the thread to do. So, when I increased the adhesion attribute, I wasn't able to max out the slashing attribute anymore. Compatibility-wise, mixing those two attributes isn't impossible, it's just not a very realistic goal to have.

Seriously, though, Severing Thread is a pretty substantial skill. It's basically perfect for me. I need to get its level up as quickly as I can.

So, Mr. Pillbug, that's what's happening. You died before your time, and now I'm whipping your corpse, but please help me raise my skill level!

And, so, I continued slashing away at the pillbug's remains with my Severing Thread.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. The Japanese chapter title is a kanji pun wrapped in a pop culture reference. The theme song for the *Street Fighter II* anime movie was called “恋しさと せつなさと 心強さと” (Love, Sadness, and a Strong Heart). The first part of the first word is “ito”, which is usually written with the kanji for love (恋) but can also be written with the kanji for thread (糸), which shares the same pronunciation. If that wasn't enough, the second word was written as 切なさ instead of せつなさ. This actually doesn't change the meaning at all, since that's the correct kanji to use in this situation, but it's deliberately written using kanji (instead of spelling it out in hiragana like in the song title) because the kanji 切 means “cut”.

Honestly, I gave up on this one and put in whatever. The proper thing to do would be to come up with an equally niche American song reference that has equally good punning capacity but, well, fuck it. I'll fix it if I suddenly think of something (or if someone's got a really good suggestion!)

Chapter 53. Bit by bit, I'm getting stronger!

After bullying my friend the pillbug for a while, I've gotten Severing Thread up to level three. To be honest, I want to keep leveling it a little more, but the pillbug's remains are at this point entirely unfit for daytime TV, so I can't really keep going. Severing Thread still isn't inflicting serious injuries, even at level three, but the garbage still keeps piling up. Pillbug, I will probably, surely, absolutely never, ever forget you. Oh, of course, once I was done I ate it and, of course, it was disgusting as always.

Hmm, now that I think about it, there really wasn't any reason for me to use the pillbug for target practice! Hitting that rock over there would probably been good enough. Oh crap, did I hurt its feelings? Nah, nah, I bet that its soul is weeping tears of joy, since it was so useful to me. Hm? "Brute"? I have no idea what you're talking about!

So, after I finished up with bullying the pillbug, a new monster showed up, drawn by the sound or something like that.

Anograch – LV 8 – *Failed to appraise statistics.*

First time I've seen one of these. It's a monkey-looking monster, about two meters tall. Since I couldn't appraise its statistics, I wanted to just slip past it, but, nope, it spotted me.

Well, somehow it turned out splendidly. It looked like the type that used speed to its advantage, and, guess what, I'm faster. I just dodged around its flailing arms and then, in an instant, snagged it with my silk and tied it up.

That was really scary! No, seriously. It's been a super long time since I've had to fight head-on like that! And this monkey was really strong, too! That terrible whooshing noise its arm made while it was flailing around made it abundantly clear that this guy wasn't a joke. If it hit me, I was absolutely dead. I dodged every swing as if it were life or death. If I had a mouth, I would have been screaming. Like, "Eeeeek!!"? Yeah, of course like "Eeeeek!!".

Thanks to my frantic scrambling around, I earned the Evasion skill. Appraising it gave predictable results: it's a skill that raises my ability to evade. Finally, the king of speed-specialization skills! On top of that, as soon as I defeated the monkey, I leveled up.

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 3 to level 4. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Concentration (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill [Throw (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, and your skill [Aiming (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Three skills leveled up in one go. Sure, they're the plain, utilitarian skills, but I'm still really happy! After leveling up, my stats now look like this:

Small Taratekt — LV 4 — (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 40/40 (green)

MP: 40/40 (blue)

SP: 40/40 (yellow), 40/40 (red)

Avg. Offense: 22

Avg. Defense: 22

Avg. Magic Power: 20

Avg. Resistance: 20

Avg. Speed: 390

Skills:

[Automatic HP Recovery (LV 2)] • [Poison Fang (LV 8)] • [Poison Synthesis (LV 1)] • [Spider Silk (LV 8)] • [Severing Thread (LV 3)] • [Thread Manipulation (LV 6)] • [Throw (LV 2)] • [Concentration (LV 2)] • [Aiming (LV 2)] • [Appraisal (LV 7)] • [Detection (LV 4)] • [Stealth (LV 5)] • [Corruption Magic (LV 2)] • [Shadow Magic (LV 1)] • [Poison Magic (LV 1)] • [Overeating (LV 3)] • [Night Vision (LV 10)] • [Visible Spectrum Expansion (LV 1)] • [Poison Resistance (LV 7)] • [Paralysis Resistance (LV 3)] • [Petrification Resistance

(LV 2)] • [Acid Resistance (LV 3)] • [Decay Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fear Resistance (LV 5)] • [Ignore Pain] • [Pain Tolerance (LV 5)] • [Strength (LV 2)] • [Toughness (LV 2)] • [Kartikeya (LV 2)] • [Taboo (LV 2)] • [n % I =W]

Just as before, everything but my speed stat is terrible. If I didn't have Kartikeya, my speed would be terrible as well, and then all I'd have going for me is my silk. Praise be to Kartikeya, and all that.

I may be happy that I got a bunch of stuff just now, but now's not the time to get careless. I could have attracted more monsters here than just the monkey. So, first things first, time to eat.

Mmm. This guy isn't poisonous! It's not bitter at all. It's got a really peculiar stink to it, though, so it's still not in the slightest bit tasty. Man, I really miss cows. And pigs. They were the best.

My stamina might be full up, but thanks to my Overeating skill nothing went to waste. Overeating... when I first got it, I was really cautious about it thanks to its negative-sounding name, but now that I know more it's really quite a useful skill.

I've mentioned this before, but I am extremely dependent on my stamina. Spinning webs and running around both drain it considerably, so a skill that lets me store up an extra pile of stamina is super useful for me. If I could use any of my magic, I might wind up spending less stamina, but there's no point in dwelling on things I can't do anything about.

Oh, on the subject of magic, I got around to appraising each of the spells I know.

Disquiet: Manipulates the target's soul to directly induce discomfort.

Phantom Pain: Manipulates the target's soul to induce illusory feelings of pain.

Deep Shadow: Darkens target shadow.

Poison Touch: Inflicts poison damage on target touched.

Disquiet is, just like it's name, a mind attack. Phantom Pain is pretty similar, too. Poison Touch seems to be pretty powerful, but it's a level one spell, so there's probably some sort of downside. Deep Shadow... does exactly what it says it does, but how useful is this? Hmm. Do I maybe link this up with higher level Shadow Magic spells? It looks like there's not really a good basic use for this.

Well, of course, it's not like I can use any of it anyway! Now then, I've finished eating up this monkey, so let's get back on the road.

Chapter 54: The struggle for sleep!

Ugggh, I'm sleepy. I'm getting pretty dangerously drowsy here. Camping out without even a simple home is really starting to get to me. I thought I'd be able to stick with it, but at this rate I'm going to be in serious trouble if I can't find a way to get a decent night's rest.

Really, though, if it was that easy to just get a good night's sleep, I wouldn't be forcing myself forward to the point of exhaustion like this. Although it does look like the Earth Dragon isn't going to chase me here, this place is still swarming with other strong monsters. A simple home is probably not enough protection.

On the other hand, making a proper home is completely out of the question! I am absolutely not going to settle down here. I need to get out of here as quickly as I can. Taking a ton of time to make a more durable home is a huge mistake.

So, the only option I really have is making a simple home, although I don't know how effective it's going to be against the monsters that lurk around here... and so on and so on.

What should I dooo? I think, as I shake my sleepy head. Even if I'm just making a simple home, can't I make it better by doing things a little differently? Like, I don't want to build it just anywhere; I need to find a place where it'll be less likely to be found. Easier said than done, though: the rocks here are really craggy, so there's not really any places to hide among them. Ugh.

Wait, hang on. Do I really have to hide? All I really need is a home that other monsters won't mess with, right? If that's the case, I've got a great idea.

Immediately, I start to move. My destination? The top of these tall, tall cavern walls: the ceiling.

Whooooaaa. So hiiiiigh. I'm scaaaaared. Can I really sleep up here? Well, I don't see any monsters around here that could either fly or climb the walls to get me. Oh, well, there's the snail-bugs, but that doesn't matter. I haven't seen any wasps flying around in this wide-

open cavern, so if I make a simple home in the corner between the wall and the ceiling, I should be able to sleep safely in there.

All right then, shall we start building? Whoa, I'm seriously high up. I've got to be about a hundred meters off the ground... how many stories is that? If I fall from here, I'm definitely dead. Well, I guess I can fasten a lifeline so that I won't fall far if I do slip, but working with zero safety gear other than that is pretty terrifying. Fear Resistance, work harder please!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”

I'm sorry! I didn't mean it. There was no need for that perfectly-timed rebuttal. Man, you startled me!

S... so anyway, I've finished the basic frame. It's pretty simple, just some basic sticky webbing stretched between the wall and the ceiling. I think that next I'm going to hang up some kind of hammock-like web to sleep in.

Hmmm. Although, wouldn't I then be completely exposed? If something had a long-ranged attack like that Earth Dragon's breath weapon, I'd be helpless against it. So, how should I hide this... I wonder if I could surround it with loose rocks?

I descend from the ceiling, and find a rock. Hmmm. This one's pretty big. How can I make this work? Can I chop it up with my silk? I wrap a thread around the rock, and activate Severing Thread. Pull! Hmm, it cut in a little bit, but this isn't going to work. Maybe if I run it back and forth like a saw...? Oh! It's working, little by little.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Severing Thread (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

The skill level went up partway through, so my work got a little more efficient. Alright! The rock slices are complete. Now, if I can get these attached to the outside of my nest, I'll have some camouflage!

I firmly attach threads to each of the rocks, then ascend the hundred meters up to where my nest is. Right, now all that's left is to start pulling on these threads! Yyyaaaargh! H... heavy! Rggggggh! Ugh, maybe if I use my body weight... And... pull!!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Strength (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

At some point my Strength skill leveled up. It leveled up, but man this is still heavy! I'm burning through all of my stamina! This... is... hard!!

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Alacrity (LV 1)].”

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Endurance (LV 1)].”

I picked up some skills! It's not like I have time to figure out what they do, though! Now... PULL!!

Hah, hah, haaaaaaah. I finally have them all up. Whoa, now that I look, I actually burned through all of my Overeating stockpile and cut into my actual stamina. Maaan, this was way too hard.

Hmm? That's weird, I thought this was supposed to be a quick-and-easy way to get some sleep... why did I put so much effort into this? Hmm... no matter how I think about it, this is my own defeat. Yyyyep.

Alright, after all of that effort, it looks like the rocks I've got hung up around my nest are doing a great job of hiding me from view. Now all that's left is making a bed... and... done!

Ahhhhh. Ab, so, lute, bliss. You just can't beat the comfort of a nest! Now I can finally, finally get some sleep in safety and comfort.

Oh! Let's check my new skills real quick before I sleep.

Alacrity: Increases the amount of instantaneous Stamina available.

Endurance: Increases the amount of long-term Stamina available.

Oh! The stamina versions of Strength! It looks like my stamina went up from 40 to 41. Stamina is super important, so this is absolutely delightful.

Alright, skills have been checked, and since I'm super exhausted from all that heavy labor, sleep time! After so long, I can finally, finally sleep soundly, so I'm going to rest to my heart's content.

And, so, good night.

Chapter 55: The Hundred-Meter High Onslaught (1)

Ahhh, sleep. Yeah. Sleep is good. Although... that's odd. I was planning on sleeping way longer than this, so why did I wake up like this? Hmm? All the hairs on my body feel like they're standing on end... This is probably bad.

I peek my head out juuuuuust a little bit from around the rocks and look down.

Anograch – LV 6 – *Failed to appraise statistics.*

Anograch – LV 3 – *Failed to appraise statistics.*

Anograch – LV 8

Statistics:

HP: 165/168 (green)

MP: 38/38 (blue)

SP: 127/127 (yellow), 109/118 (red)

Failed to appraise statistics.

Anograch – LV 5 – *Failed to appraise statistics.*

.....

An army of monkeys, about fifty members strong, has assembled beneath me.

Eh? This is a joke, right? They're looking up right at me. How?! My rock camouflage is perfect! I checked it myself earlier, and when you glance at it, it just looks like a little chunk of rock sticking out of the wall. What the heck?!

Whoa, this is bad! Those monkeys are climbing. Their progress is slow and they're having a tough time of it, but they're still coming up. It looks like I've still got a few minutes until they reach me, so now I really need to come up with some kind of plan.

From here, it looks like running away along the ceiling is probably my best bet. Attempting to fight that many monkeys is, how should I put it, impossible. So! Now that that's settled, let's get out of here immediately.

Huh? The ceiling seems to be a different color... What?! It's ridiculously slippery! My threads can barely even stick to it! What the heck...

The ceiling, after about one or two meters, transitions to a different kind of rock. It's so smooth that my feet can't get a grip, and even maximally adhesive silk doesn't stick very well to it at all. Looks like running away across the ceiling isn't going to work.

So I've got no choice but to run away along the wall. They'll probably try to chase after me, but that'll be a battle of perseverance. Alright, let's gOW!

Wha?! What the heck! A rock? Whoa, these jerks are throwing rocks at me! Wait, they can reach me all the way up here? Whoa, here comes another!

Quickly, I duck behind an outcropping, and the rock hits the wall where I was moments ago. It doesn't seem to have very much force behind it, as you'd expect of a rock thrown a hundred meters straight up, but if it hits me while I'm clinging to a vertical surface, there's a good chance I'll get knocked off. To be able to both aim at me from down there and also actually make that throw... they probably have the Throw and Aiming skills, huh.

An awful chill runs through me. I can't run away like this. What am I going to do!

Wait, I've still got one more thing I can try: counterattack.

Luckily, I've build a home here, even if it is simple. Before those monkeys get here, I need to fortify this place as much as possible so that I can meet them head-on. This is going to be like that battle with the wasps, where I was clinging to the wall, but this time it's not my enemies that have the terrain advantage. Rather, my simple home provides me both fortifications and footholds that I can use to seize the advantage for myself.

This is my only shot.

First, I scatter strands of silk, using Thread Manipulation to stick them to the walls around me. It's crude, but at least this'll make it a little bit harder to climb up to get me. It takes me longer than I would like, since I have to keep dodging the rocks they're still throwing at me. By the time I'm finished, the first wave of monkeys is about halfway up the wall.

Not good. These monkeys are moving faster than I had thought. There's no way that silk I've spread out so far is going to be able to stop all of them. What now? Aaah, do I have any way that I can attack them from here? I've got Throw and Aiming too, but what am I going to throw...

Ah! I might not have anything to throw, but I certainly have something to drop!

I poke my head out from behind my rocks and invoke Poison Synthesis. Of course, what I synthesize isn't that Weak Poison. No, I synthesize the venom that I've spent my entire life as a spider perfecting: my deadly Spider Poison.

A ball of poison materializes before me and hovers briefly in the air before gravity pulls it down. The monkeys climbing on the wall have no way to dodge. The poison hits the lead monkey square in the face, and it falls, screaming in agony. This... works!!

I quickly glance over at my mana bar. I only spent a single point! Or, in other words, my maximum is forty shots. With everything I spent on Thread Manipulation, though, I've only got about twenty-five. If every one of those hits, though, I'll be able to take out over half of those things!

I immediately fire off a second one. It finds its mark, and another monkey falls. I keep firing, steadily; if it works, it works.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Synthesis (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

My skill level went up, but I've got no time to check it. Besides, there's no way the new poison would beat out my Spider Poison.

I've taken down quite a few monkeys, but they've started to adapt. They're no longer climbing up directly below me, and have started moving to the side. I drop the rest of my poison on the stragglers.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Aiming (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

Good, good. The last few monkeys beneath me fall comedically. The rest have moved out of range; I won't be able to hit them with poison anymore. The timing's pretty good, though, I was starting to get a little worried about my mana reserves.

I scatter a few threads in the monkeys' way. This fight has only just begun.

Side Story 8: Skill Encyclopedia

My eyes are rooted to the tome in front of me.

“What do you think? It’s amazing, right?” asks Kanata (er, I mean, Katia, the duke’s daughter), with an eager expression on her face.

Ever since the Appraisal ceremony, Katia’s been coming over to hang out frequently. At first, I wanted to call her Kanata, but that felt kind of unnatural, so I decided to go with her current name: Carnatia, or Katia for short.

Katia, though, has continued to insist on calling me “Shun” like she did before. It’s a stretch, but you can take the “sh” sound from the start of Slaine and the “n” from the end and sort of turn it into “Shun”, so it’s been rather forcefully decided that that’s my nickname. I don’t mind much that we’re using nicknames for each other, but to everyone around us, it looks like we’ve got a very close relationship. This is absolutely true; Katia and I are great friends. Katia, however, is now a girl, and there are those who are thinking of our relationship as the other kind of close.

Top on the list of these people is my younger sister Sue, who is sitting between me and Katia. Whenever Katia comes over, Sue always gives her the most withering glare, then firmly insists on being between us at all times. Katia always smiles wryly when this happens. I tried so hard to be a good older brother, why did this have to happen...

“This is the Skill Encyclopedia from the Duke’s manor,” says Katia. “This one is, of course, far more detailed than the ones you can find in the markets.”

This book contains thorough descriptions of every skill known to humankind, down to the most minute details. Not only does it list what each skill does and how it can be used, but it also lists the steps you need to take to acquire it. Basically, it’s a strategy guide.

Incidentally, when Katia speaks the language of this world, she sounds completely different compared to when she speaks Japanese. Her Japanese is very rough and masculine, but

this world's language comes out with the eloquence and grace expected of the nobility. The gap between what she sounds like and what I know is in her head used to seem enormous, but I've gotten used to it.

"Wow, this is great. Now that we have this, we can get any skill we want, right?" I ask.

"Oh, not at all. Time, after all, is limited. One must first decide which skills they truly want, and then devote their limited time to their acquisition."

Excitedly, I flip through the book. There are plenty of skills that I recognize, and even more that I've never seen before. Whenever I saw a new skill with a particularly powerful effect, I'd pause for a little bit.

"If I am not mistaken, you and Sue have already acquired the basic stat-raising skills, correct? If you have yet to acquire them, you should do so soon."

The stat-raising skills Katia is referring to are the ones that simply boost your stats, like Vitality, Mana Pool, Strength, and so on.

"When these stat-raising skills reach level ten," says Katia, "they undergo an evolution. The upgraded skills not only have greatly superior effects, but they also grant a permanent bonus to your stats whenever you level up. We have yet to be allowed into battle with a monster, so our levels are still, of course, one. As such, I feel that it would be most wise for us to acquire these bonus-granting skills before we begin to raise our levels."

Our levels are still one. They're raised by killing any sort of creature, not just monsters. We've not been granted permission to go outside, let alone fight monsters, so we haven't been able to level up yet.

Even so, our stats are still gradually increasing thanks to our constant training. Rapid growth, however, seems limited to level-ups.

"If at all possible," Katia continues, "I would like to evolve each of our stat-raising skills twice, but I fear that may be somewhat out of our reach."

When you grind up a skill to level ten and it evolves, you gain a number of new benefits. However, earning each level requires acquiring even more skill proficiency points than the last, so actually reaching level ten tends to be extremely difficult.

“Our stats will get dramatically better once we acquire the high-level skills like Fortitude, Fortress, and Kartikeya. I will be most satisfied if we could reach this goal, but it is essential that we at the very least acquire their precursors.”

“Definitely,” I say. “I’m really surprised, though; I don’t see any skills to boost XP or skill proficiency.”

Skills that boost your experience gains are invaluable in RPGs, yet there’s nothing anything like that here.

Katia nods. “Correct. Also, have you noticed?”

“Yeah.”

Now that I’ve finished skimming through the entire encyclopedia, I see what Katia’s hinting at. Sue, who was reading over my shoulder, doesn’t seem to have picked up on it. She looks disgruntled at how easily Katia and I are understanding it.

“There’s no crafting skills,” I say.

“It is worse than that. Every single skill listed in this book is intended for use in combat.”

That’s right, even though there are enough skills to fill this entire book, there are no crafting skills, and no skills whatsoever that are strictly non-combat. There are skills that can be put to use as crafting skills, but all of them are combat skills that happen to have a useful side effect. For there to be this many skills, and for them to all be dedicated towards one purpose... I have a bad feeling about this.

It could just be that Katia and I are only noticing this because of our experience playing games back in Japan. It could be that everyone who grew up in the world simply thinks of this just as the way skills work.

“It’s like...” I whisper, “...like this world was built for combat.”

As the words leave my mouth, a chill runs down my spine. This is a world where the only way to level up is to kill something, a world where every skill is made for combat. This really does seem to be a world that heavily encourages combat.

“This is not widely known yet,” says Katia, “but I hear that the Demon Lord is rapidly massing its troops.”

“That’s...”

“Someday, we will be forced into battle. Until then, we should concentrate on becoming as strong as we can.”

I nod, silently.

Chapter 56: The Hundred-Meter High Onslaught (2)

The monkeys climb the walls towards me. I send out sticky strands of silk using Thread Manipulation, and adhere them to the wall in their path. This isn't good. My mana reserves are almost dry. I think I might have overdone it with the Poison Synthesis. If it's come to this, I'm going to have to string those threads up manually.

I quickly duck into the shadow of a crag as another rock sails towards me. The monkeys still left on the ground are still throwing rock after rock at me. I don't think I'm in any danger of taking a fatal wound if I get hit by one of those, but this isn't doing anything to help my outlook.

The first of the monkeys rushes into the zone I've filled with my sticky threads. Of course, it immediately gets tangled up and can't move any further. Now that the vanguard is tied up, they'll be forced to go around. I've bought myself a little bit of time?!

These guys, they're using their captured compatriot as a ladder!! They've still got a ways to go before they get out of my sticky-thread zone, but they're going to be here way quicker than I thought.

...Fuck!

I can't afford to keep anything in reserve. I cast my first throwing net down at where the monkeys are most closely bunched up. Anything that gets caught in that I can ignore for now. They can struggle and struggle, but all they'll do is get tangled up even further in my sticky webbing. They won't be able to move very much. If they get stuck in the path, they'll make for a great obstacle.

I can also ignore the monkeys that are already stuck to the walls. Based on the few stats I saw earlier, I don't think any of these things are strong enough to pull themselves free. I won't fight with Severing Thread this time. My proven strategy so far is to use my maximally-adhesive threads and arrest their movements. Once I've done that, I can kill these things off at my leisure.

I throw my second net. Once again, a ton of monkeys are caught up in it. Right as I launch my third net, though, a rock comes sailing up from below, and I dodge it reflexively. Shit, these guys have good timing.

On top of that, those monkeys had been getting wise to my throwing nets and had started scattering to either side. They're spread out thinly enough that I won't be able to capture more than one or two at a time. These guys are probably the smartest monsters I've had to face so far!

If they're so smart, surely they realize this isn't worth it! What do they stand to gain from killing a tiny little spider like me? Yet these monkeys keep single-mindedly coming at me, no matter the cost. Leave me alooone! I'll forgive you for your passionate pursuit. Why don't you turn that passion to a better cause? Something like, I don't know, ████ing? (That was a voluntary bleep.)

Even while thinking such frivolous thoughts, I've been scattering more silk. Since the monkeys have dispersed to either side, I have to throw my silk everywhere to try to catch them all. I'm using Thread Manipulation the barest minimum in order to accomplish what I want to do. In a situation like this, running out of mana would be extremely dangerous.

Somehow barricading myself in my simple home is not an option, because I am one hundred meters from the ground. My silk may be strong, but it's not at all invincible. It's weak to fire, and the earth dragon was able to blast it away effortlessly. It's amazingly resilient, but if something comes at it with enough force, they can break through.

I don't think these monkeys are anywhere near strong enough to tear through it. If we were on the ground, I'd absolutely hide myself away and turn this into a siege. But we are not on the ground. Let's say they were all to start attacking my home. They'd all get stuck, of course, but then my home would have to support all of their bodyweight. I don't know how many it would take, but eventually my simple home wouldn't be able to bear it anymore, and when that happens...

My home has no foundation. It's strung between the wall and the ceiling, and held up solely by adhesion. It can support at least my weight and the weight of those rocks, but I don't know how much more it can actually hold up. I had thought about expanding and fortifying it before, but I chose to work on trying to tie these things down instead. If I had expanded it, I would have been able to greatly multiply its maximum load. Considering how many monkeys there are down there now, that might have actually been the best idea. Wish I'd gone with that one.

Why, do you ask? Because there aren't any fewer monkeys down there than when I started! I thought there might have been a chance that I didn't actually kill the ones I knocked off the wall with my poison, but, no, there is indeed a pile of corpses accumulating at the base of the wall. It doesn't look like any of them are somehow being revived.

The only explanation is that there are somehow more monkeys down there than there were when we started. They're receiving so-called reinforcements! Ha ha... these guys just keep pouring out of somewhere. When we started, I think there were about fifty, but now there's easily twice that number. And on top of that, more are still on their way! This is terrifying; I'm in for a marathon, and there's no finish line in sight.

What do I do? Seriously, what do I do? I'm not just worried about my mana; my red stamina is also super low! I've been spinning silk more-or-less constantly since this fight began. If I run out of stamina, this is over. I won't be able to spin any more thread, and that alone is reason enough for me to avoid that happening at all costs.

I get ready to let loose the Silken Smasher. My target: the closest monkey to me. I launch it, it hits. Good! I start hauling it up, bringing with it the creature stuck to it.

It thrashes about violently, but I tie it up with my silk, then stab it through with my Poison Fang. As I do so, one of the rock-throwing monkeys scores a direct hit.

Ow!! My health only went down by five, though. As I thought, each rock doesn't have very much force behind it by the time it gets up to me, since it's thrown all the way up from the ground. It hurts, but thanks to Ignore Pain and Pain Tolerance, I push through it with force of will.

My poison drains the life from the monkey. Then, I start eating!

This is a race against time. I need to finish this thing off as quickly as I can so that I can return to battle. The monkeys down there are still struggling against my sticky webs. Many of them have been caught up permanently in my threads, but at the same time, they're building a bridge of bodies that's almost complete. Bit by bit, they're closing the gap. If I get my stamina back, I can go another round, but I really need to think of this as my only chance to do so. So, I must now finish eating this thing as quickly as I can, not wasting a single scrap!

NnngHAAA!

Finished! I can somehow feel the killing intent from these monkeys grow stronger, but now's my turn! I am the one who eats! I'm not going to let myself be devoured by the likes of you!

Chapter 57: The Hundred-Meter High Onslaught (3)

I scatter silk as quickly as I can.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Concentration (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

Thanks to all of this concentrating I’ve been doing, Concentration’s level has gone up. That’s not really important right now, though. I’ve really got no attention to spare.

Below me, the monkeys are piling up on the silk that I’ve been smearing around. Still, their numbers aren’t decreasing at all. Instead, they just keep coming. Even as I keep tying more and more of them down, even more reinforcements are approaching. It’s like every single monkey in the area is making an appearance.

I have two mana remaining. I have no idea what bad things might happen to me when it goes down to zero, and that’s enough reason for me to stop myself from using those last few points. I can’t use Thread Manipulation at all.

I spin my silk. Another monkey gets tangled up. But then, it does something I could not believe.

It jumped.

It strikes the earth below with a wet thud. At this height, even a monster can’t survive. It seems like these things would rather die than serve as further roadblocks to their compatriots.

Unbelievable. I never would have thought I’d see anything like this, and it sends shivers through me. I’d held out hope that if I continued ensnaring these things as they came, they’d eventually give up, but that fragile hope has been thoroughly shattered. These monkeys will stop at nothing to destroy me. There’s only two endings to this fight: either I kill all of these monkeys, or they kill me.

Another rock sails at me, but I can't avoid it. I don't have that kind of free time. It hits me square on, and my health decreases. Even still, I push through it with Pain Tolerance and Ignore Pain. I'm entrusting my health to Automatic HP Recovery. I must continue scattering my silk, despite the rocks. If I don't, weathering this battle will be completely impossible.

I was making fun of these monkeys just a little while ago. After all, they're no big deal next to that Earth Dragon. Really, nothing is really a big deal compared to the Earth Dragon. That was a huge mistake, though. I'm a huge idiot. How could I forget how weak *I* am? Literally everything in the area is a formidable opponent when you compare them against me. How could I have started thinking of these guys as small fry?

On top of that, despite how much stronger these monkeys are than I am, these monkeys are suicidally bent on crushing me into the ground. When a more powerful monster stakes its life on my destruction, I can't just carelessly waltz through it. I need to make every preparation and tackle the situation head-on.

I'm hit by another rock, and for an instant, for a single instant, I flinch. In that gap, a monkey finally breaks through and seizes my leg. Half of its body has been tangled in my webs, but it's reached out with its long, unhindered right arm.

My leg makes a horrible grating sound in its clenched fist. I force myself to push away the pain as my foot is crushed, and lunge forward to stab the monkey's arm with my Poison Fang.

The monkey uses the last of its strength to tear half of my leg off.

Pain. Mind-searing pain. Pain beyond the limits of what Pain Tolerance can protect me from. Can Automatic HP Recovery fix a missing body part? Do I have to wait for a level-up?

No. Now is not the time for me to worry about a missing leg. I'm wasting time, and the monkeys are seizing the opportunity to climb even higher. I spin my silk. I spin all of my silk. I spin my silk until I once again am down to just a sliver of stamina.

The monkeys that get caught up in it fling themselves to the ground below. I can't even spare a glance as I spin more silk.

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 4 to level 5. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Concentration (LV 3)] skill has been raised to level 4, your skill [Aiming (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4, and your skill [Toughness (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3. You have acquired additional skill points.”

The instant I hear that voice, I dive into the safety of my home. This couldn't come at a better time... or a worse one. I'm molting. I impatiently struggle out of my old skin as quickly as I can. My missing leg is, of course, perfectly healed. I fling off the last of my old skin, and immediately return to battle.

As expected, the monkeys are clinging to the outside of my simple home. Finally, the monkeys have reached my final line of defense.

Leveling up has completely recovered my mana and stamina, but it might have come too late for me to be able to use it...

No. There's still a way. I reach my legs out of my simple home.

Of course the monkeys latch on to them immediately, but does it look like I care?! I reach out and touch the enormous tangle of silk that I've been constantly spewing out. I focus all of my will, and activate Thread Manipulation. Little by little, I feel my power spreading out through the mass of threads. Since I'd spent all that time raising my skill level, the total amount of thread that I can control has considerably increased. It's still impossible for me to control this entire thing, but that's okay.

My mana depletes at an enormous rate as I force my will into my silk. My captured legs are making that same awful grinding noise again, and I am being slowly dragged out of my home. The monkeys' outstretched arms grab at me. I somehow manage to avoid the ones reaching for my head, but the rest of my body is seized. The monkeys crush me mercilessly with all their strength, and my health starts to rapidly decrease as pain shoots through me.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Vitality (LV 1)].”

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Mana Pool (LV 1)].”

The so-called “Voice of Heaven” calls out just as I finish my preparations. With all of my remaining power, I manipulate my threads.

At my command, all of the threads I had stuck to the walls come unglued. Of course, this means that all of the monkeys stuck to them start to plummet. With an enormous crash, a veritable wall of silk and captured monkeys smashes down on the throng still below.

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 5 to level 6. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Thread Manipulation (LV 6)] skill has been raised to level 7, and your skill [Overeating (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4. You have acquired additional skill points.”

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 6 to level 7. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Pain Tolerance (LV 5)] skill has been raised to level 6, your skill [Stealth (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6, and your skill [Evasion (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

In a single instant, I massacre them.

Chapter 58: The Hundred-Meter High Onslaught (4)

Thanks to my level-up molting, I've freed myself from the monkeys' grasp. They're still clinging on to the two layers' worth of old skin. I was able to knock off the vast majority of those monkeys after I brought that entire wall of silk down, but the ones who were clinging to my simple home are still completely intact. Well, except for the fact that they're still stuck in my web. I layer some more silk on top of them to make absolutely sure they can't move, then use Poison Fang to make them stop moving for good.

After I finish off the very last monkey, I breathe the tiniest sigh of relief. This is not even close to over with, but at the very least I have cleared the first wave.

I whip myself back into shape. There's no time to relax. this is not even close to over with! These monkeys have yet to be exterminated. I cannot relax until every single one of them is dead.

I immediately leave my home and look beneath me. A grisly scene spreads across the ground below.

All of the monkeys that had been unable to free themselves from my webs now lie smashed to pieces amidst the corpses of those that had fallen off before. Yet even still, even amongst this horrifying carnage, the monkeys' fighting spirit still shines forth.

I immediately start spreading new webs along the wall. These guys aren't giving up. When they've finished regrouping, they'll renew their assault. Before that happens, I need to make sure that I'm done regrouping as well.

The monkeys' reinforcements still keep coming. Seriously, they're still coming... Give me a break!

On top of that, amongst those reinforcements were monsters that should not have been there.

Bagragrach – LV 3 – *Failed to appraise statistics.*

Bagragrach – LV 4 – *Failed to appraise statistics.*

Bagragrach – LV 6 – *Failed to appraise statistics.*

Mouths like those of a giant crocodile. Brutal teeth, like saws, within those mouths. Thick, heavy bodies that tower twice as tall over the other monkeys. Those deformed apes have arrived.

Those things were the first monsters I saw when I arrived in this area. The other monkeys' species name is "Anograch". I really should have noticed the similarity. These giants must be the monkeys' evolved form. So, monsters that should never have arrived have shown up as part of the reinforcements.

Three of those things have lumbered into view. These things are pretty low-leveled compared to the other things I've seen, but this is an evolved form. I can't rely on the level. To start with, the monkeys are formidable opponents in a fair fight, and their evolved forms are definitely not going to be any weaker. When I factor in its fiendishly brutal appearance, it's probably best for me to think of these things as on a level incomparable to that of the monkeys. They're nowhere near as terrifying as the Earth Dragon, but there are three of them. This fight just got harder, again.

I pause, dumbfounded, for a moment, but I'm yanked back to reality as the surviving monkeys start to advance. They take a wide route to either side of my pile of fallen silk to avoid getting caught, and start to climb back up the walls. From that, I know that they're now being extra-careful about my silk. Man, these are seriously difficult opponents.

I lay down additional layers of silk, keeping an eye on the giant monkeys. They haven't moved since they arrived. Maybe they aren't super proactive about cooperating with the regular ones? That would be great, but I can't afford any optimism. I absolutely must keep an eye out for any movement from them.

It seems like the monkeys have stopped throwing rocks at me. It wasn't very effective, and it might be even harder to reach me now that there's a huge pile of silk in the way. It looks like they're committing entirely to climbing the wall to come at me instead. I'm actually really thankful for that. Those rocks were able to shave away my health and stop me from moving freely; simple, but effective. If they're not doing that, then it's all for the better.

Oh, a big monkey has started to move. It slowly reaches down and picks up a rock. ...Wait, a rock!? That rock, which it is lifting up as if it weighs nothing at all, is the same kind of *boulder* that I chopped up to cover my home with! That should have been stuck firmly into the ground, yet that monkey is picking it up like it weighs nothing at all! Even lifting individual slices up one at a time was ridiculously heavy!! Huh? What are you doing with that...? W... wait, why are you holding it up like that... don't tell me?!?!

I evacuate my simple home as fast as my legs can take me. Just after I get clear, the boulder smashes into my home with all the force of an artillery shot. When the cloud of dust starts to clear, I can see that my simple home has been completely pulverized.

You're kidding, right? What unbelievable power. A single hit from one of those would end me. Oh, lucky me, there aren't any more boulders in arms' reach of the big monkeys. There won't be any more ridiculous artillery strikes for now.

Though... my simple home, my last line of defense, was just obliterated. I'm going to have to fight without a home to fall back to.

This is bad. It's bad enough that I've lost my fortifications, but I was using that structure to secure my footing. I've been able to focus all of my efforts so far on attacking because I was so confident in my footing. Now that it's gone, though, there's a chance that I might slip and fall at an inopportune moment. I'm not going to actually plummet to my death if that happens, thanks to the thread I've got attaching me to the ceiling, but I'd still be left completely defenseless. If this weakness gets out, the monkeys are absolutely going to capitalize on it.

I come to a very quick decision. I need to build a scaffold to grab on to, even if it's hastily made. Sure, I won't be able to work on spreading silk elsewhere, but whenever the monkeys

finally get here, I won't have time to build anything then. If I don't do it now, I'm going to deeply regret it.

Right! I've completed a structure just big enough for me to cling to! This is where I'll fight my foes.

The second round of this siege begins now.

Chapter 59. The Hundred-Meter High Onslaught (5)

The monkeys keep advancing, and I keep spreading my webs in their path. So far, everything's going like it did the first time around. There are, however, a few important differences.

The monkeys have figured out what my silk can do to them. If they get caught, they can't escape. So, they've arranged their formation such that the largest monkeys are out in front. The vanguard charges forward as far as it can into the areas where I've stuck my silk, pulling as many strands with it as it can, clearing the path a little bit more for the monkeys behind it.

So, now there are countless monkeys stuck, spread-eagled, to the wall. Not only that, but in order to stop me from flinging them all off at once again, they're clinging tightly to the wall itself as well. Thus, the monkeys are advancing on a highway built from their compatriots' backs. When each monkey gets stuck to a thread, it throws itself against the wall with no concern for its own escape. This is a completely suicidal strategy, but I'm amazed that these monkeys have come up with such an effective way to avoid getting all captured. This fight is *seriously* difficult.

This strategy, though, requires constantly sacrificing troops as long as they keep employing it. They may be advancing, but their number is steadily decreasing. Since the giant monkeys appeared, I haven't seen any new reinforcements, and at the rate they're going, the monkeys' force will be annihilated well before they can reach me. If the giant monkeys don't do anything, that is.

I've been constantly keeping an eye on the giant monkeys. Even while I'm busy fighting the other monkeys, I have to be constantly vigilant. This is brain-bendingly exhausting work, and my Concentration skill has leveled up as a result.

Now, one of the giant monkeys are finally making a move, the one with the lowest level. It turns away and starts to move back a few steps. I'd like to say that it was leaving, but, alas,

the world isn't that kind. It spins around to face me, then starts charging straight forward towards the wall.

Seriously?! Sirens scream in my brain as I realize what might be going on. I frantically start to make plans for a counterattack.

The monkey does exactly what I feared it was going to. It charges forward to just before the pile of fallen threads, then jump straight over it. Worse, its stupendously powerful leap carries it straight through the air to me in an instant.

I fling my barely-completed throwing net at the flying monkey. I catch it by surprise, with no way to dodge the net in mid-air. The monkey's trajectory is deflected slightly downward by the net, and it crashes into the wall right below me with a dull thud. It sticks to the wall, tangled up in my net and stunned.

It recovers in an instant and starts struggling with all its might to escape my net. I waste no time in layering more silk on top of it, pinning it in place, and using Poison Synthesis to make more Spider Venom and drop it in its enormous mouth. The monkey thrashes against both my threads and my poison. It didn't die after one dose of poison, so I impatiently synthesize another. The glob of poison drops cleanly into its enormous, waiting mouth.

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 7 to level 8. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Visible Spectrum Expansion (LV 1)] skill has been raised to level 2 and your skill [Acid Resistance (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4. You have acquired additional skill points.”

I gained a level, so it seems like the giant monkey's used up the last of its strength. I fling my molting skin off of me as quickly as I possibly can. I still don't have the luxury of letting my guard down.

I look back at the invading monkeys crawling up the wall, and see that another of the giant monkeys is there with them.

It looks like this one took advantage of the distraction of the flying monkey and climbed up the wall along the same route the other monkeys were taking. So fast! It was down on the ground just moments ago, and now it's already far up the wall. It mercilessly crushes the monkeys along its path, using them to fling himself higher. With the incredible strength of its powerful legs and arms, it covers the distance to me in an instant.

In a panic, I fire off strands of silk towards the oncoming giant. Despite the fact that it was flying straight up a vertical wall, it quickly dodged to one side. Unfortunately for it, the direction it dodged hadn't yet been covered by the road of monkeys. The wall in that direction is covered thickly in my webbing.

The giant monkey sticks to the wall. It immediately starts struggling to rip itself free, but it looks like even a giant monkey's strength isn't enough to break free of my silk. Instead, the wall itself starts to make a disturbing sound.

Of course, there's no way I'd allow anything like that to continue. I immediately lay down more silk, covering its entire body. For now, I should be able to leave this one be.

I immediately start looking around again. Two of the giants have already moved, the third must be close behind. My guess is correct, and I locate the third giant monkey immediately.

It's right next to me, with its enormous mouth yawning open, about to snap shut on me.

!?! Now is not the time for me to be concerned about falling, or anything like that. Or, rather, I moved purely on reflex, with no time at all to think. I leap from my scaffolding, diving into empty space.

Avoiding it entirely is impossible. The monkey crunches down on all of the legs on my right side, as well as a chunk of my body itself. My health meter empties in an instant. Blinding pain rips through me, and my consciousness flickers. If I pass out now, though, I'm never going to wake up again.

Mid-air, I frantically fire off my silk. A line of it sticks to the wall and saves me from plummeting. The whiplash, however, slams me straight into the wall, and my awareness dims once more. I grit my fangs and rein in my fleeing consciousness.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Fainting Resistance (LV 1)].”

I somehow manage to stay conscious, although I have no idea if it’s because of my new skill. I reorient myself and look up at where my scaffolding had been.

The third giant monkey has ripped apart my structure, but in doing so has gotten tangled up in the ruined silk. It’s only natural. There’s no way I’d just make an ordinary scaffold. I would, of course, build scaffolding that would turn into a trap when I needed it. I didn’t expect that it would be torn apart in one blow, though.

I make my way back up the wall. Half of my legs are gone, so I have to use Thread Manipulation to drag myself up. I haul myself above the thrashing monkey, then use Thread Manipulation to bind it firmly in place. I synthesize some Spider Venom, and force the monkey to gulp it down.

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 8 to level 9. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Automatic HP Recovery (LV 2)] skill has been raised to level 3, your skill [Vitality (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill [Alacrity (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, and your skill [Endurance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

I molt again, after I level up. Whoof. I seriously thought I was going to die. That was seriously dangerous, just now! If I hadn’t been able to level up just now, I might have legit died for real!

But, this is it. It looks like number two is slowly starting to struggle free, so I pile some more silk on top of it. The rest of the monkeys haven’t gotten anywhere near as close as I

thought they would, since the safe path they'd worked so hard to build had been crushed by the giant. I should be able to make up for the time I lost when the giant monkeys attacked. They might still have yet another piece in reserve, but I can't see a way for them to swing this in their favor again.

I say that, but I'm not going to get careless here. My carelessness has led to so much pain for me so far, so it's only natural. I'm not going to lose focus here, not until this battle's finished.

Chapter 60: The Conclusion of the Hundred-Meter High Onslaught

I watch as the remaining monkeys tangle themselves in my webs. No matter how hard they strain, I am just barely out of the reach of their outstretched hands. I bind those hands in silk, and stop each monkey from moving entirely.

I look around my surroundings. Everywhere I look, I see monkeys, captured in my webs. There aren't any left who can still move around. Just to be safe, I look down at the ground below, but it seems like no more reinforcements are coming. It doesn't sound like it either, when I listen closely.

I have finally taken out every single one of these monkeys.

This is an amazing thing, but I can't yet let thoughts like that slacken my focus. I may have taken them all out of the fight, but I have yet to actually kill them all. Below me, so many monkeys have been caught in my webs that it's actually a huge pain to try to count them all. Bundled up in there with them is the conspicuous form of the one surviving giant monkey.

That last giant monkey is still trying to rip itself free. Realistically, it can apply more force than my silk can handle. It's not going to give way immediately, but if I leave it alone for a while it'll eventually break out. For now, whenever it's looked like it was getting close, I've added more silk to make sure that it stays put.

I had to keep the giant monkey still while I was intercepting the other monkeys. This turned out to be way harder than I had expected. I'm glad I didn't let myself relax after I had defeated the first two giant monkeys. Keeping this thing restrained took way more of my strength than I could have imagined, and now my mana and stamina have both been exhausted.

I haven't finished it off yet. Ultimately, it's still alive because I haven't yet had enough spare time to actually kill it. With the rest of the monkeys still coming, I didn't really have any time to devote to it. On top of that, it's stuck on the route the rest of the monkeys were using to get to me. If I wanted to slay the giant monkey, I'd have to get closer to the rest of them, and that kind of suicidal action is something I simply cannot do.

My biggest fear was that the regular monkeys would try to help the giant monkey escape from its bindings. It's definitely possible that the giant monkey could break its way out of my webs if it had assistance from the other monkeys, so I was really concerned. Unexpectedly, they didn't do it. These monkeys, who have been suicidally ruthless in pursuing whatever path it took to come and kill me, somehow decided not to free the giant monkey, even though it would have been the most effective strategy. I'm super relieved, but I have no idea why they act like they do.

Well, I say that, but really, I have no idea why they were even attacking me in the first place. I don't think they thought of me as food, so I really have no idea why they'd attack me like that. The only thing I can think of is that maybe they showed up to avenge the one monkey I'd killed a little while ago, but to go this far to do that... naaah.

Umf. Even if I keep thinking about it, it's no use. I just can't understand how a monster thinks.

First things first, I finish off the giant monkey. As you might expect, I'm not nearly brave enough to approach such a dangerous creature so that I can attack it with my fangs. Instead, I did what I'd done with the other two: got above it and used Poison Synthesis to pour Spider Venom down its throat. The monkey, after two swallowing two shots' worth, goes limp and lifeless.

Now that the biggest threat has been dealt with, I go and finish off the rest of the monkeys one by one with my Poison Fang. Poison Fang does cost a little stamina with every use, but I'm not really worried at the moment. The cost is extremely low, and I don't think I've ever managed to run completely out of stamina before.

But seriously, there are too many monkeys. Even Poison Fang is going to run out before all of those monkeys can die. I didn't really have a choice, so I stopped for a moment halfway through to eat one of the monkeys and regain a little stamina.

Even though they can't move at all, the monkeys still try to intimidate me whenever I approach. Their shrieks seem to have a little bit of fear mixed in there, but I don't really care. Hey, you guys, you were the ones who picked a fight with me! At least be prepared to die for it. Don't start crying when it's your time to die.

So, paying them no mind, I finish the rest of them off.

“Requirements have been met. You have earned the title [Merciless], and have been awarded the skills [Corruption Magic (LV 1)] and [Corruption Resistance (LV 1)]. Your new skill, [Corruption Magic (LV 1)], has been integrated with your existing skill, [Corruption Magic (LV 2)].”

Oh, looks like I got a title. Another dangerous-sounding one, at that. This is the second one that's given me Corruption Magic, huh. I can't help but express my dissatisfaction here. I'm not evil! I swear!

Well, for now, let's wait to look at these new skills. I leveled up a ton during that fight, and I wasn't able to take the time to check my new skills then either. Once I have some free time, I'll sit down and examine them all.

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 9 to level 10. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Poison Synthesis (LV 2)] skill has been raised to level 3, your skill [Throwing (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3, and your skill [Mana Pool (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

“Level requirement met. Small Taratekt, you are eligible for evolution.”

My level goes up in the middle of grinding my way through getting rid of these monkeys. Ah, is that so? I'm level ten already, huh? ...Whoa!

Sure, I leveled up a ton while I was battling, but is it seriously already time to evolve?!

“You have a choice in evolutionary forms. Please choose between [Taratekt] and [Small Poison Taratekt].”

Hm? I expected that I'd get an option to drop “small” from my species and become just a regular Taratekt, but “Small Poison Taratekt”? Does the “poison” part mean that it's a more venomous species?

Well, I'll put one off too, for a little bit. There's no way that I can evolve out here, exposed like this, in such an unsafe space. I've got to hurry up and finish cleaning these guys up.

“Requirements have been met. You have earned the title [Monster Slaughterer], and have been awarded the skills [Greater Strength (LV 1)] and [Greater Toughness (LV 1)]. Your existing skill, [Strength (LV 3)], has been integrated with your new skill, [Greater Strength (LV 1)], and your existing skill, [Toughness (LV 3)], has been integrated with your new skill, [Greater Toughness (LV 1)].”

Hmm? Another title? And yet another dangerous-sounding one, too. Is this the one that comes after Monster Slayer? My Strength and Toughness skills got integrated with different skills? I absolutely cannot forget to figure out what that all means when I'm done with this task.

So, after that, I went back to the boring, boring work of disposing of the rest of these monkeys. Poison Fang, then Poison Fang, and then, occasionally, taking a break to have a snack and reinforce my webs.

And, so, just like that, every living thing besides me wound up dead.

Side Story 9: Skill Points

Katia and I are lazing around. A little while ago, the two of us had been doing a bunch of exercise in the castle's sporting ground to work on leveling up our skills. We're finished with that for now, so we're taking some time to just relax.

"Maaan, I'm wiped," says Katia. "My magic skills are really getting up there, but my physical stats are nowhere near that level."

Since Sue is, for once, not here with us, Katia is speaking in Japanese. When it's just the two of us alone, we usually talk in Japanese like this.

"Tell me about it," I reply. "Still, though, our reflexes are way better than they were in our previous world. The more we train, the better we get."

"Yeah, I know, I know. I always used to wonder what we were supposed to get out of the track and field days that our school kept doing, but here, the more I run, the more my stamina grows."

In this world, the more you train, the more your stats increase, thanks to stat-affecting skills. Since we're not able to level up right now, the only thing that we can do if we want to improve our stats is train more and more. If we keep steadily training, though, we will definitely get stronger. All this training may be difficult, but if I keep reminding myself that it's for my own benefit, I can keep pulling through.

"So? What are you up to?" asks Katia.

"Alacrity, Endurance, Strength, Toughness, and Speed are all up to level eight," I say, Appraising myself with a Gem of Appraisal.

This Gem of Appraisal is the ninth-level one belonging to the Duke's household, Katia's family. A gem like this is so valuable that some countries might even call it a national treasure, yet Katia just blithely brought it with her when she came over. I have to wonder if the Duke's household is really okay with this, but since it's here, I might as well use it.

“Seriously, dude, you’re climbing the ranks way too quickly. Is this just raw talent...?” Katia mutters, bitterly.

Although we’ve honestly been following the same training regimen, my skills have been leveling up faster than Katia’s. In this world, anyone who wants to put the effort in can become strong, but the rate of growth varies from person to person. This is the result of individual talent.

“Ever since I was reborn into the Duke’s family, people have been calling me a prodigy! And, still, there’s this huge difference in our growth rates. You cheater.”

Katia looks away, resentfulness in her eyes. Even if you say that, what am I supposed to do about it?

“Oh, by the way,” she says, “have you used any of your skill points?”

“Nah, I never got around to it, so I still have all of them.”

Skill points are a kind of currency that you can use to purchase new skills without first having to train up your proficiency. Normally, you’re not supposed to be born with any, but since Katia and I were reincarnated from another world, we started out with quite a few.

“Stockpiling a hundred thousand points... you bourgeois, cheating bastard.”

“Whoa, you’re getting mean.”

I mean, I really have never gotten around to spending them. A while ago, I was thinking about spending them on a few magic skills, but Anna told me not to use any magic. There was no way that Anna knew that I had skill points to spend, of course, but I still felt that going behind her back to learn magic anyway was some kind of betrayal. Since then, I really haven’t had any desire to spend any of my points.

“Then, Katia, did you spend yours?”

“...Only a thousand.”

If I remember correctly, Katia had fifty thousand points. From the way she asked the question, I thought she might have used them all up, but she's barely touched them.

“What did you get?” I ask.

“...Keep it a secret.”

“What? Haha, okay, just tell me.”

“...You’re absolutely not going to laugh at me?”

“I won’t! Tell me!”

“...Appraisal.”

I managed not to laugh, but I probably made a really strange face in the process. Appraisal is the textbook example of a skill that you should never deliberately obtain. I’m suddenly curious as to why she’d do such a thing.

“Why would you do that?”

“Well, so, it’s the way the reincarnation trope works in light novels. Look, you’re in an alternate universe, so it’s hard to gather any information, right? So, the trope says that an appraisal skill is top-tier OP, and I thought that I should only be so lucky...”

“Wait, wait. If someone were to write up a list of all the skills that you should absolutely never take, Appraisal would be at the top. Why, after all of the warnings, would you take it anyway?”

“Like. I’m. Trying. To. Say, I picked Appraisal up when I was a baby, before I’d heard any of that! Right when I had just been reincarnated, before I even knew left from right, I desperately wanted to know anything about what was going on. So, I started thinking about appraisal skills, and then all of a sudden I heard Divine Words in my head! You can’t seriously blame me for acquiring it on an impulse, after all that.”

I understood her immediately. I definitely remember how terrified I was when I was still a baby and had no idea what was going on. I couldn’t understand anything that anyone was saying around me, which only made it worse. I completely understand how hearing the Divine Words speaking in perfect Japanese would make you want to cling to them.

“So, is Appraisal really as shitty as they say?”

“Yeaah. Massively shitty. Since it’s low-level, it’s basically useless, and it makes my head hurt. On top of that, if you don’t put in the time, your proficiency will never increase, and it’ll never gain any levels. I have been patiently grinding it out with every moment of my free time, but I’ve only ever managed to get it up to level four. My heart is going to break!”

I’m getting tired of just hearing about it. Using the Gem of Appraisal, I Appraise my own list of skills. The list that then gets displayed shows all of the skills that I’m able to acquire, as well as how many points it would cost me to purchase them. I search through the list, looking for Appraisal.

“Ah, it looks like it’ll cost me a hundred points to buy it.”

“Wait, seriously?”

A hundred points is the smallest number you can spend on a skill. Hundred-point skills are either skills with very little effect or skills that you would have a high affinity with. Since Katia spent a thousand points on it, I’m not sure that Appraisal is a skill with little effect after all. It may be fairly worthless when its level is low, but it would definitely be really useful at higher levels. So, it seems likely that I simply have a high affinity for Appraisal.

I thought about it for a minute, then acquired Appraisal. I now only have ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred skill points remaining.

““Kay, bought Appraisal,” I say.

“Wait, seriously?” Katia says, exactly as she did just a moment ago. “Don’t cry about it later.”

For now, I’ll save the rest of my skill points until I really need them.

Chapter 61: I'm evolving!!! (part 2)

Alright, annihilating those monkeys was great and all, but... now what? Everything around me is pretty quiet. Even though we were being so noisy just a little while ago, none of the other monsters have decided to drop by. Maybe it's the opposite; maybe since we were being so noisy, everything else has decided to stay clear.

Well, whatever, I can put off figuring that out for a bit. For now, I'm going to build another simple home up near the ceiling. I can't really say that it's perfectly safe, buuut it will probably be able to keep the weaker monsters from approaching.

Honestly, I really think I should evolve immediately. I don't really know how long I black out for while I'm evolving, but last time I felt like it wasn't a super huge duration. This is just my intuition, though; I can't rely on it for sure.

Regardless, either way, evolving leaves the door wide open for danger to follow. So, a time like this seems absolutely terrible for evolution... if you disregard the huge pile of food I've managed to collect. To evolve, or not to evolve... definitely evolve.

On top of that, if I don't evolve, I might be stuck at a max level of ten. I did put an end to a considerable number of monkeys after I leveled, but I still haven't leveled any further. This would be alright if I merely haven't earned enough experience points to level, but there's the distinct possibility that I just might not be able to grow any more if I don't level.

The problem, you know, is picking what thing I should evolve into: Taratekt or Poison Taratekt.

Hmmmm. I can't decide! Last time, the choice between being "Lesser" or normal was pretty obvious, but now, things are nowhere near as clear. A Taratekt is probably the adult version of what I am now. I don't know what kinds of changes that would involve, though... Poison, I also have no clue about. If it lives up to its name, it'll make all of my venom-based skills stronger, but then what about everything else?

I'm stuuuumped. Maaaaan, it would be great if I could just use Appraisal at a time like this...

Wait, could I?

Hm? What's that alert message-looking thing underneath my stat bars? Huhhh? "Evolution possible"? What the heck? The words "evolution possible" are blinking. Hmmmm?

Just in case, I drop another Appraisal on it.

Evolution available: **Taratekt** or **Small Poison Taratekt**.

What... the heck?! Miss Appraisal, are you seriously...?! You're the best! Woohoo! Now I can appraise things before I choose to evolve!

Maaan, Appraisal has been really outdoing herself lately. Now then, Appraisal says:

Taratekt: *A standard adult specimen of the species of spider monsters known as the Taratekt. Its carnivorous fangs drip with venom.*

Small Poison Taratekt: *A young specimen of a rare subspecies of the species of spider monsters known as the Taratekt. It carries an extremely powerful venom.*

Well, that decides it. It's got to be poison.

Why? It's a "rare subspecies", you know? Rare. Capital-R Rare. If I'm given a choice between something ordinary and something rare, there's no question that I'm going to pick rare, riiight? I'm Japanese! I'm weak to words like "rare" or "limited".

Well, now that that's decided, I've got to finish making this simple home. Ah, but I don't have very much stamina left... I'll eat this conveniently-located monkey, and refill it.

...Whoof, done. Now then, let's give this another try.

Whoooo, what could that be, up there on that otherwise barren wall?! What a splendidly prominent spiderweb!

This time, I'm not using any rocks. Even if I wanted to, all of the dead monkeys glued to the wall around here makes camouflage basically worthless.

But, man, I'm tired, physically and mentally. I fought such a ridiculously tough battle, so of course I'm exhausted. Blacking out from evolving is probably different from sleeping, but it still feels like resting.

“Small Taratekt, you are now evolving into a Small Poison Taratekt.”

Right. So, with that, good night.

“Evolution has completed. You have become a Small Poison Taratekt. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from evolving: your skill [Poison Fang (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9, your skill [Spider Thread (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9, your skill [Thread Manipulation (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8, your skill [Concentration (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5, your skill [Appraisal (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8, your skill [Corruption Magic (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3, your skill [Shadow Magic (LV 1)] has been raised to level 3, your skill [Poison Magic (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill [Poison Resistance (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8, your skill [Petrification Resistance (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3, your skill [Fainting Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, and your skill [Corruption Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. From evolving, you have earned the skill [Poison Attack (LV 5)]. [Poison Fang (LV 9)] has been integrated into [Poison Attack (LV 5)], raising its level to 9. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Chapter 62: Poisonous Spider

Good morning. I was able to sleep peacefully. So, I guess I must have evolved successfully, huh. Mrgh. Just like last time, I'm ridiculously hungry, to the point where I'm feeling sluggish. As I planned, it's time for me to eat the monkeys I'd stocked away as food.

I pop my head out of my simple home and glance around. Right, right! Nothing's out there. Safety confirmed!! Well then, let's get out there and eat every last bite, huh? Time to dig in.

Now then, while I'm eating, let's check up on my stats or whatever. While I was in combat, my skills kept grinding their way up, and I think I even got some new ones. I also think I'll have gotten a lot of things from evolving. So, the survey says...:

Small Poison Taratekt — LV 1 — (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 56/56 (green)

MP: 1/56 (blue)

SP: 54/56 (yellow), 1/56 (red)

Avg. Offense: 38

Avg. Defense: 38

Avg. Magic Power: 27

Avg. Resistance: 27

Avg. Speed: 537

Skills:

[Automatic HP Recovery (LV 3)] • [Poison Attack (LV 9)] • [Poison Synthesis (LV 3)] • [Spider Silk (LV 9)] • [Severing Thread (LV 4)] • [Thread Manipulation (LV 8)] • [Throw (LV 3)] • [Concentration (LV 5)] • [Aiming (LV 4)] • [Evasion (LV 2)] • [Appraisal (LV 8)] • [Detection (LV 4)] • [Stealth (LV 6)] • [Corruption Magic (LV 3)] • [Shadow Magic (LV 2)] • [Poison Magic (LV 2)] • [Overeating (LV 4)] • [Night Vision (LV 10)] • [Visible

Spectrum Expansion (LV 2)] • [Poison Resistance (LV 8)] • [Paralysis Resistance (LV 3)] • [Petrification Resistance (LV 3)] • [Acid Resistance (LV 4)] • [Decay Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fainting Resistance (LV 2)] • [Fear Resistance (LV 6)] • [Corruption Resistance (LV 2)] • [Ignore Pain] • [Pain Tolerance (LV 6)] • [Vitality (LV 2)] • [Mana Pool (LV 2)] • [Alacrity (LV 2)] • [Endurance (LV 2)] • [Greater Strength (LV 1)] • [Greater Toughness (LV 1)] • [Kartikeya (LV 2)] • [Taboo (LV 2)] • [n % I =W]

Skill points available: 200

Oh? Ohh!!!

My stats went up... yeah, there's definitely an increase. I was expecting a much more dramatic change, seeing as how I just evolved, buuuuuut, as usual, it looks like only my speed has really increased. It's just my speed that's this unbelievably high, huhhh... Hmm, I wonder how fast I can go, if I charge forward at full throttle? It looks like I'll just be able to run away from fights, assuming I'm against a normal enemy.

My skills have also leveled... ...Hm? What's actually changed from before evolution? Hmm, making me fall asleep and miss everything that happens while I'm out is really unfair. There isn't a system log somewhere, is there?

I expected my stamina to go down like it did, but my mana emptied out too. I didn't notice that last time... Well, I'm using my mana way more now than I did back then. I've been pouring a lot into Thread Manipulation, and now I've also got Poison Synthesis, which was really useful in that last fight.

No, seriously, Poison Synthesis was *extremely* useful back there. I thought it was a little bit iffy when I first got it, but it's come in handy waaay more often than I expected. I'm going to have to try finding some other creative uses for it. Oh, that reminds me; I think its skill level went up, so maybe it can synthesize new kinds of poison now.

Poison Synthesis Menu:

Weak Poison

Spider Venom (LV 9)

Damage adjustment, duration adjustment

Hm? There aren't any new kinds of poison, but there's new stuff under it. "Damage adjustment" and "duration adjustment"...?

Damage adjustment: *Modifies the strength of the poison-type damage.*

Duration adjustment: *Modifies the duration over which the poison's effect is applied.*

Hmmf. So, now I can control both the strength of the poison as well as how long it continues to apply damage after it's in my target's system?

To test this out, I'll try modifying my Weak Poison. The damage and duration numbers are listed now, with a plus/minus column for adjustments. Right now, both stats are at plus zero. I try increasing the damage until I cap it out, at a maximum of plus three.

Okay, I think I get it. I should be able to customize my poisons freely now. When I want to make someone suffer for a long time, I can extend the duration, and when I want to deal a lot of damage at once, I can increase the strength. I'll be able to make whatever poison I want.

It does, however, look like there's a limit to how much I can customize it, probably based on the skill's level. Just to confirm, I try modifying my Spider Venom, but I can't raise its damage any higher than its default of nine.

I think that I'm going to get more and more ways to customize my poisons as my skill level starts to go up, which means I'll be able to use exactly the right poison for any particular situation. Oh man! Poison Synthesis's stock prices are skyrocketing!

Let's move on to the rest of my poison-related skills. Poison Fang has disappeared, and seems to have become Poison Attack instead.

Poison Attack: Applies poison-type damage to an attack.

Ummm? Huh? Does this... mean I can apply poison to literally all of my attacks? Eh? Isn't that terrifyingly good? If it's like that, well, that means I can apply poison to my threads, right? Huh? Isn't this way too absurdly powerful? I've already been cheating my way through fights using Spider Silk, but making it this much more powerful? Is this okay? Is this really okay?

...I'm going to have to run some experiments as soon as I have my Stamina back.

Oh, Poison Magic's level went up, too! It's poison-related, so let's check this out.

Poison Magic: Magic that manipulates poison. The spells that may be cast are dependent on skill level. Available spells: Poison Touch (LV 1), Poison Bolt (LV 2)

Poison Bolt: Fires a projectile at the target, dealing poison-type damage.

Ah, a ranged attack! A very standard ranged attack. I want to use iiiit... but I caaaaaan't..... Seriously, how do I use magic?

Right. Next, we have Poison Resistance. This is the last poison-related one, right? Wow, as expected of a rare poison-type species, all of my poison skills went up significantly. Especially Poison Attack! I am going to have to start messing around with that as soon as I get my stamina back. If it really is as terrifying as I think it is, my combat ability just exploded.

My stats may not have gone up very much, but my skills definitely made up for it. Since I'm so heavily reliant on my skills, maybe I should focus on raising those instead of trying to boost up my stats.

Chapter 63: Miss... no, wait, M'lady Appraisal!!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Overeating (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5.”

Oh! While I've been gorging myself on these monkeys, Overeating's level went up. Well! If I'm eating this much, yeah, it'll go up. I'm up to the triple digits in monkey consumption by now, right? Yet still, my belly has yet to start swelling. This is all thanks to both the effects of Overeating and the strange phenomena that happens right after I evolve, but, seriously, where is all of this food going?

On top of that, even though I've already eaten so much, I feel like I can still eat even more! Long story short, I've been tearing into these monkeys with gusto.

While I've been eating, I checked up on all of my other, non-poison-related skills as well. I got a ton of new skill levels! Thread Manipulation and Spider Silk nearly doubled in level. Couple that with my new Poison Attack skill, and these are turning into some really powerful skills that I can absolutely rely on.

Getting Spider Silk to level up was already difficult, but once it started getting up there, it was seriously impossible to get it to rise any further. I am waaaay too excited that it finally leveled up!

And Concentration leveled up too! I'm pretty sure it was way lower-leveled than this before I battled those monkeys. That fight was extremely chaotic and required intense concentration, so of course I earned a good amount of skill proficiency. The more practical experience I have putting something to use, the more my proficiencies go up, it seems. Aiming seems to keep going up a lot, so that's probably the case.

Now that I think about it, when I was hiding from the Earth Dragon, my Stealth and Fear Resistance skills shot up at a ridiculous rate. I was literally on the brink of death there.

Next is... oh, two of my other magic skills besides Poison Magic went up. Let's see!

Corruption Magic: Magic that directly affects the soul. The spells that may be cast are dependent on skill level. Available spells: *Disquiet* (LV 1), *Phantom Pain* (LV 2), *Phantom Insanity* (LV 3)

Shadow Magic: A low-rank Darkness magic that manipulates shadows. The spells that may be cast are dependent on skill level. Available spells: *Deepen Shadow* (LV 1), *Widen Shadow* (LV 2)

Phantom Insanity: Implants madness directly into the soul of the target.

Widen Shadow: Manipulate the size of a shadow.

How should I put this... Corruption Magic sounds, uh, really evil. What's this? Implant madness? Like, force someone to go insane? That's waaaay too nasty.

I want to use iiiit...

But, Shadow Magic, on the other hand, is, ah... questionable. This new spell and the first-level Deepen Shadow spell feel like they're completely useless unless I combine them with higher-level spells. It's not like I can use it right now anyway, but this seems super difficult to level up. I mean, how could you possibly use it in combat like this? It's not like I can use it right now anyway! This is so important that I have to say it twice!

My various resistances went up as well. Let's take a look at my new Fainting Resistance and Corruption Resistance skills, though. There's a decent chance that the name and the actual ability are going to be a little different, like Decay Resistance was. Actually, when I just look at the name "Corruption Resistance", there's no way that I wouldn't have to ask what the heck it actually is.

Fainting Resistance: Makes it more difficult to faint.

Corruption Resistance: Increases defenses against effects that directly target the soul.

Well, that's about as expected. Yeah... Corruption Resistance seems straightforward, but Fainting Resistance... would that apply to, say, sleep-inducing attacks? Ah, well, I don't even know if sleep attacks are even a thing. If they did exist, wouldn't there be a Sleep

Resistance? What exactly is Fainting Resistance useful for? Eh... well, if I do encounter any sleep-inducing attacks, I'll just have to avoid relying on Fainting Resistance.

Hmf. Next is Vitality and Mana Pool, then Greater Strength and Greater Toughness. I'm pretty sure I can guess what they are, though...

Vitality: Increases HP based on skill level.

Mana Pool: Increases MP based on skill level.

Greater Strength: Increases physical attack power based on ten times the skill level. In addition, when leveling up, provides an additional increase to physical attack power based on the skill level.

Greater Toughness: Increases physical resistance based on ten times the skill level. In addition, when leveling up, provides an additional increase to physical resistance based on the skill level.

Yep, just as I thought: stat-raising skills. I'm really happy about Greater Strength and Greater Toughness, though. I figured that they'd increase my stats, since they integrated Strength and Toughness into them when I got it, but I didn't expect to see extra increases on level up like what Kartikeya gives me. Yeah, the Monster Slaughterer title really does seem like the upgrade to Monster Slayer; since Monster Slayer got me Strength and Toughness to start with.

This might be a little selfish, but I kinda wish that Strength and Toughness hadn't gotten integrated. With my stats as weak as they are, every tiny little boost helps. Defense, especially. I was soooo close to dying during that monkey battle. Hmmmm. Well, the skill proficiency got integration too, so it'll level up more quickly, right? When I think about it that way, I guess integration was probably for the best...? Well, not like I can do anything about it either way.

Now then. The last thing. Yep, the last thing. I put this one off. Yeah, it's only natural. After all, when I just started out with it, it just betrayed my expectations over and over. Lately, though, it seemed like it was actually starting to turn around, but... when it had finally, *finally* started to live up to my expectations, *this* happens. You can understand that I'd be disappointed, right?

Right, Miss Appraisal?

Your level went up, you know? Why didn't you get any better? Well, I guess it's maybe alright? After all, I can see skill points in my status, I guess... it's convenient? But you've been rocketing forward so quickly lately, so this kinda seems like a ripoff? Did you maybe get a little carried away? Hey, what's the deal?

Haaaah. No waaaaay. It's been a while, I can say it again, right?

Uuuuuseless.

Aaaaaargh. Well, being able to see my skill points it convenient, so I guess I can put up with this. While I'm at it, I guess I'll appraise my skill points. I've been using them without really knowing what they are, so getting the executive summary would be nice. So, *click*?

Huh, a ton of rows of text just popped up. What the heck? Well, let's take a look at these...

.....

Miss... no, wait, M'lady Appraisal! Please forgive my impudent words just now! I realize now your greatness! I was such a fool to not have comprehended this earlier! I beg of you, forgive me!!

On the display that popped up is a list of all the skills that I can acquire with my current skill points.

Chapter 64: M'lady Appraisal, you really are quite brilliant

Appraisal really is amazing. This new display is a catalog of all of the skills I can acquire, each labeled with their point cost. Right now, I have two hundred points. Since skills cost a minimum of one hundred points, I can either buy two one hundred point skills or one two hundred point skill.

Well, whatever! What's really important is that now I have a list of skills that I haven't yet acquired. And, since it's a display, I can double-appraise them all. In other words, without having to first acquire a skill, I can look its effects up in advance! Magnificent!

With this, I can look around for useful skills. No longer do I need to worry over whether or not the skill I'm about to buy will be useless. On top of that, I might be able to find skills that I could start trying to earn by gaining proficiency, rather than spending skill points on them directly. The possibilities here are endless.

Now then, for now let's go down the list and Appraise every single one of these skills, shall we?

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Overeating (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”

I've been continuing to eat as I appraise, and Overeating's level just went up again. There are still a ton of monkeys left to eat, but my stomach's still not anywhere close to its limit. This stomach's amazing. Is there a “Extradimensional Belly” title or something?

Hoo. This is magnificent. This display is basically an illustrated reference guide to skills. If I save up three hundred points, the list will get bigger, right? Yeah, definitely. But I'd need to raise my level a ton, huh... My level went up a ton while I was having that idiotic fight to the death against those monkeys, but normally it goes up waaay more slowly than that.

Hmm, if I do wind up spending these points, the skills on display here now will probably disappear. That would be a pain. If there's a really good skill, though, I want to get it... what a dilemma.

What to do... should I buy a new skill, or should I hold on to my points? Guh, how troubling.

I've already finished going through all of the skills in the list. There were a few in particular among them that caught my eye.

Mana Perception: *Allows for the perception of mana.*

Mana Manipulation: *Allows for the manipulation of mana.*

Are these two skills, just maybe, required in order to use magic? It seriously looks like that. I mean, the two of them are even displayed right next to each other! These skills are probably really effective when they're used together as a set. I can acquire them both for just two hundred points!

However, there's a big problem. I actually already have Mana Perception. It's baked into Detection. Yeah, my Detection skill already contains Mana Perception. So that means that if I do wind up buying Mana Perception after all, it'll probably just get integrated straight into Detection.

That's completely unacceptable. Or, rather, if that were to happen, I wouldn't have any hope of using magic for the rest of my life. Since it's impossible for me to activate Detection, it's thus impossible for me to activate Mana Perception. If, as I fear, both of those skills are required to use magic, this might be the end of that.

What the heck is this game-breaking bug? Ah, no, no, this isn't actually set in stone. I'm sure that, at some point, I'll be able to use magic. So, until then, I'll put this aside.

It is entirely possible that there's a skill out there that will make Detection usable. However, I don't really know how useful it might wind up being, so I don't really want to throw any more of my valuable skill points away to try to make a bad skill good. Right now, what I want are skills that have clear and obvious effects.

I had thought about getting Poison Claw a while ago, but that's no longer necessary thanks to earning its upgrade skill, Poison Attack. There's SP Consumption Reduction, but since I have Overeating, it's not a very high priority. Rather, there's a chance that I might just earn it automatically, like how I got Automatic HP Recovery by accumulating skill proficiency.

Well, I've been putting on this big show about being troubled about this, but in reality I already have my sights set on a particular skill. The only question remaining here is if I should buy it or save my points. This skill is just that much of an obvious cut above the others... in many ways.

Pride (100): *The power of n %, a strength almost rivaling that of the gods. Drastically increases the rate of experience gain and skill proficiency gain, and greatly increases the rate of stat growth. Furthermore, allows for interference in the MA domain, surpassing the W system.*

I have no clue what any of that means. The description is unintelligible, and I have no idea why a skill like this would be available for just a hundred measly points. I tried Appraising the weird vocab words like "n %", "MA domain", and "W system", but the results were all the same: "Impossible to Appraise". What I *did* manage to understand is that this skill would crank up my experience and proficiency gain, as well as amplify my normal stat growth. That alone makes it well worth the points.

I seriously have no idea what to do here. A skill that's as incomprehensible as this one is seriously dangerous. I have no idea what downsides this could possibly have. Even still, the benefits are tremendous. I looked, and I could not find a single other skill to increase either experience or proficiency gain. I have no idea how large the effect on stat growth is, but from the phrasing it sounds pretty big...

Seriously, I have no idea what to do.

Chapter 65. Pride

Pride. The most grave of the seven deadly sins, a title reserved for the highest Demon Lord of Hell. Whenever it appears in a game, it's the name of a final boss or a powerful cursed item.

Just from the sound of its name, I imagine that taking this skill isn't going to do me any good. However, figuring out what it does is extremely tempting. It's so tempting that I really want to jump on it, even if I know it's a trap! Truly, a devil's snare.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Overeating (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

I suddenly notice that I've finished off the last of the monkeys. Wooow, I'm amazing. I ate *all* of that. My stamina, of course, is full. Coupled with the Overeating stockpile, I have a tremendous amount of energy saved up.

Come to think of it, didn't Overeating's description say something about getting fatter when I'm using it? Am I really fatter?

Hmmm. I can't say anything for sure because I can't see my entire body, but... I don't really look that fat. Oh! Now that I'm thinking about it, it really doesn't look like evolving did anything to my appearance either. Nothing really happened last time either. The Taratekt species must just not change very much, huh.

Or, maybe the changes happen gradually? Hmm, that really doesn't seem like evolution, huh... The regular and the giant monkeys were very clearly different species, huh... I really don't think that's the result of a gradual change, huh...

Well! That's enough of letting my thoughts drift off, there's more important matters to consider. The description of this Pride skill seems to overlap a lot with the mysterious n % I = W skill I have. That alone makes me think that these two things couldn't possibly be

unrelated. At the moment, I have no idea what this mysterious skill does. It doesn't seem to be either a positive or a negative thing... probably. Come to think of it, is there even any downside?

...It's never a good idea to just leap to a decision, but, I've made up my mind. No... my mind had already been made up from the beginning. I have a premonition, you see. This skill, I absolutely must take it. It's a very vague premonition. I must set aside my worries about the pros and cons, and get this skill. I can't shake this feeling.

“You currently possess 200 skill points. The skill [Pride] can be acquired for 100 skill points. Would you like to acquire it now?”

Yes.

“You have acquired the skill [Pride]. You have 100 skill points remaining.”

Alright. I really did it!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Taboo (LV 2)] has been raised to level 4.”

Now I've really done it!

“Requirements have been met. You have earned the title [Lord of Pride], and have been awarded the skills [Abyssal Magic (LV 10)] and [Hell].”

Now *they've* really done it!

O... oh. How did that happen...? Wait, no, no, isn't that completely unbelievable?!

What the heck? What the heck?! I'm going to say it again! *What the heck?!!*

Taboo's level went up. Twice! I did that!

And I got a really powerful title, too. Yaaay? You know, this “Abyssal Magic” thing really looks like an absolute top-tier magic, doesn’t it? At level ten, too! That’s weird, right?

...Well, for now, let’s look up the descriptions of Abyssal Magic and Hell.

Small Poison Taratekt — LV 1 — (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 56/56 (green)

MP: 14/156 (blue)

SP: 54/56 (yellow), 1/56 (red)

Avg. Offense: 38

Avg. Defense: 38

Avg. Magic Power: 127

Avg. Resistance: 127

Avg. Speed: 537

Skills:

[Automatic HP Recovery (LV 3)] • [Poison Attack (LV 9)] • [Poison Synthesis (LV 3)] • [Spider Silk (LV 9)] • [Severing Thread (LV 4)] • [Thread Manipulation (LV 8)] • [Throw (LV 3)] • [Concentration (LV 5)] • [Aiming (LV 4)] • [Evasion (LV 2)] • [Appraisal (LV 8)] • [Detection (LV 4)] • [Stealth (LV 6)] • [Hell] • [Corruption Magic (LV 3)] • [Shadow Magic (LV 2)] • [Poison Magic (LV 2)] • [Abyssal Magic (LV 10)] • [Pride] • [Overeating (LV 7)] • [Night Vision (LV 10)] • [Visible Spectrum Expansion (LV 2)] • [Poison Resistance (LV 8)] • [Paralysis Resistance (LV 3)] • [Petrification Resistance (LV 3)] • [Acid Resistance (LV 4)] • [Decay Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fainting Resistance (LV 2)] • [Fear Resistance (LV 6)] • [Corruption Resistance (LV 2)] • [Ignore Pain] • [Pain Tolerance (LV 6)] • [Vitality (LV 2)] • [Mana Pool (LV 2)] • [Alacrity (LV 2)] • [Endurance (LV 2)] • [Greater Strength (LV 1)] • [Greater Toughness (LV 1)] • [Kartikeya (LV 2)] • [Taboo (LV 4)] • [n % I = W]

Skill points available: 100

...Wait. Wait just a second.

That's weird. My stats are... weird. When did my mana, magic power, and resistance get so high...? They're a hundred points higher than they were just a second ago. How...?

...Is this also one of Pride's effects?

Well, you know, it's not like a stat increase is ever a *bad* thing. Yeah. Best not to dwell on it. Right! Appraise, appraise...

Abyssal Magic: *The most powerful of dark magics, able to manipulate the darkness of the Abyss itself. The spells that may be cast are dependent on skill level. Available spells: Gates of Hell (LV 1), The Hell of Nonbelievers (LV 2), The Hell of the Lustful (LV 3), The Hell of the Gluttonous (LV 4), The Hell of the Avaricious (LV 5), The Hell of the Wrathful (LV 6), The Hell of the Heretics (LV 7), The Hell of the Violent (LV 8), The Hell of the Fraudulent (LV 9), The Hell of the Traitors (LV 10)*

Hell: *Allows for the manifestation of Hell.*

A... ah...

How should I put this? This looks waaaaay too dangerous. What's with all the hell stuff? The “manifestation of Hell” in particular sounds extremely awful...

Gates of Hell: *The first gate.*

The Hell of Nonbelievers: *The hell for those innocents who did not believe.*

The Hell of the Lustful: *The hell for those who were stained with lust.*

The Hell of the Gluttonous: *The hell for those who were consumed by their appetites.*

The Hell of the Avaricious: *The hell for those who chased their greed above all else.*

The Hell of the Wrathful: *The hell for those who were controlled by their anger.*

The Hell of the Heretics: *The hell for those who spread their heresy.*

The Hell of the Violent: *The hell for those who gave themselves to violence.*

The Hell of the Fraudulent: *The hell for those who whispered lies.*

The Hell of the Traitors: *The hell for those who betrayed those who trusted them.*

And what's with this Appraisal result? It doesn't actually tell me anything about this magic. Who the hell wrote this?

...First thing I did was to test to see what Hell did, but there wasn't even a hint of a reaction. I was torn between feeling disappointed and relieved.

Side Story 10: The Second Prince

I watch as Sue and Clevea square off against each other, wielding practice swords. Sue strikes up at Clevea from below, making use of her small build, but Clevea parries the attack with ease. Sue continues resolutely attacking, but Clevea avoids every attack with her precise defense.

Sue's fighting style is straight-forward and powerful, despite her smaller build, while the muscular Clevea fights with fluidity and grace. Both of them move exactly the opposite of how you think they would from the impressions they give off. Sue is by no means a weak fighter, but she looks extremely unskilled next to Clevea's superior fighting experience. It's to be expected, though: Clevea possesses the upgraded version of the Sword Talent skill, Sword Genius, and has it up to level seven. Sue only has Sword Talent, and it's at level six. This is a gap that cannot be bridged.

This, however, is not a battle that could be decided in an instant, despite the large difference in stats. Sue has activated both Battle Magic and Battle Spirit. These are skills that consume mana and stamina to boost your stats. In the hands of Sue, who has a tremendous amount of mana to throw around, the stat increase isn't small at all. Sue's physical-type stats have all been considerably boosted, to the point where she might even have an advantage, stat-wise.

Clevea's operating under a handicap, not using Battle Spirit herself. If she did, she'd win in a heartbeat.

Even without using Battle Spirit, Clevea looks like she'll probably still win. Sue might have a stat advantage, but it's very slight, and that alone isn't enough to make up for the fundamental difference in skill between them. Sue has no way to turn this around.

As expected, as soon as Sue's attacks faltered, Clevea counterattacks. It strikes her squarely in the side, and she falls to the ground.

Anna, who had been waiting on the sidelines, immediately runs in and heals Sue with recovery magic. She stands up, brushing the dirt off of her clothing with a resentful look on her face.

“I lost,” she says.

“Princess, if you are able to move that well at your age,” says Clevea, “you will soon be able to pass me. You have incredible talent.”

“I don’t need your flattery.”

From the sidelines, applause rings out. “It’s not just flattery!” calls a voice. “It’s really true, your movements are incredible.”

Everyone present, myself included, looks over in surprise. None of us, not even Clevea and Anna, had noticed anyone arrive. He’s been standing right next to me, and I completely failed to realize it.

“Julius!” I exclaim.

“Hey! Did I startle you?”

This man, is my older brother from the same mother, the second prince of the kingdom, Julius. He laughs merrily at his own successful prank.

“When did you get back home?” I ask. “Just yesterday,” he says. “I wanted to stop by and see you, but after I met with Father and our older brother, I didn’t have any more time.”

Julius is fairly older than I am, and he’s usually off on various missions outside the country. It’s rare for him to return home like this.

“Sue, you’ve become even more amazing since the last time I saw you!” says Julius, warmth in his eyes. “I’m always surprised by how much you grow each time.”

Sue, however, doesn’t say anything at all. For whatever reason, she doesn’t seem to like him very much. From my perspective, Julius is way nicer than my other two older brothers,

and I like him better. I respect him above all else. Seeing my respected older brother and my beloved younger sister at such odds makes me seriously upset.

“Sue, it’s not nice to treat your older brother like that,” I say. “Ha ha,” laughs Julius, “it’s okay! Sue’s just in a difficult stage of her life right now.”

Julius seems to be sensing something. If I factor in my age from my previous life, I’m older than Julius, but I don’t think I can possibly match up to his level of maturity.

“Hey, Shun, how about you? It’s been a while, want to train?”

“Really?!” I say. “Definitely, thanks!”

Training with Julius... I’d want nothing more.

“I’m going to borrow this,” says Julius, taking the practice sword from Clevea.

“Y... yes,” she says, looking very small. It’s very unusual to see her this tense. Well, she’s dealing with Julius, so it’s very understandable.

“Right! Ready whenever you are. Come at me whatever way you want!”

“Okay!”

Immediately, I activate Battle Magic and Battle Spirit. I can’t afford to be stingy with my skill usage against Julius. I’m going to go all out.

I step forward sharply, swinging diagonally upward. Julius parries it easily, holding his sword with only one hand. I threw all of my power behind that attack, yet he blocked it easily with just a one-handed grip.

I, however, expected this. There’s no way Julius would possibly get hit by a strike like that. I immediately draw my sword back and unleash my next swing. That gets parried too.

This is fun. Even at my full power, I can’t even touch him. No matter how quick my strikes, no matter how much force I put behind them, no matter how deft my skills, I’ll never lay a

single blow on him. I can't even imagine how I could possibly manage to slip past his sword. Being able to fight against a foe so vastly superior... this is extremely fun.

No matter how much I want to continue, though, it eventually comes to an end. My Battle Magic and Battle Spirit run out. Breathing heavily, I fall to my knees.

“Hm! Shun, your attacks are straight and true, just like your endlessly stretching talent.”
“Thanks... Ju... li... us...” I gasp, bit by bit.

Even though I'm this exhausted, Julius hasn't even broken a sweat. As expected of the Hero, the strongest man in the world.

Someday, will I be able to stand next to this man? One of my greatest dreams in this world is to someday be his equal. I can't even come close to him now, but one day, I will definitely be strong enough that I can watch his back for him.

This is my guiding light.

Chapter 66: Skill Rush

Aaahh... I can't help think I've really screwed up... What kinds of traps lurk within this ridiculous skill... No matter how I look at it, it's weird that I'd get a new title just for learning a skill, right? And an obviously bad one, at that. Taboo leveled up, too, which is also bad...

Hmmmm. The fact that I can't immediately tell what the downsides are is pretty terrifying. Taboo doesn't seem to have any effect, and Pride isn't doing anything right now... I just really don't want to blindly stumble off the edge of a cliff.¹

Well, on the other hand, worrying about it isn't going to make anything actually happen. There's nothing I can really do now; I'll worry about it when the time comes. If, of course, I actually have time to worry...

For now, I'll save my remaining skill points. I just learned some amazing new magic that I'd really, really like to try out, but before I can do that I think I need to do something about Detection. I think I'm going to need the Mana Manipulation skill too. If that's true, then I'll need both that and some sort of skill to do something about Detection. With only a hundred points left, I can't get both.

For the time being, instead of spending anything else, I'm just going to wait until I have two hundred.

Well then, I've finished eating all of these monkeys, so I don't have anything to do here anymore. Let's get out of here. I'll start exploring along the wall again. It's really quiet, though! I can usually hear the cries of other monsters echo in the distance, but right now I can barely hear anything. There's no monsters to be seen nearby either... this is a rare moment of peace.

This is the monkeys' doing, right? Yeah, a huge crowd of them all moved in at once, so of course the other monsters would flee. That's probably it.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Prediction (LV 1)].”

Hm? A skill? Show me, show me.

Prediction: Increases analytical ability when making predictions.

Hfmmmm. Well, it's not a bother or anything, but this isn't a particularly useful skill. It's got an effect that isn't really noticeable. It just lets me turn things over in my head faster, and only in specific circumstances. It's something I could have bought for a hundred points.

...Pride cost that much, too, though. Yaaaaah, this really is weeeird...

But, man, there's seriously not a single other monster here. I've got no sense of impending danger right now, and there's nothing awful staggering around, so it really looks like there's nobody here. Even if I focus really hard as I look around, there's nothing.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Enhanced Vision (LV 1)].”

Oh? Another skill? Show me, show me.

Enhanced Vision: Enhances the sense of sight.

Well, ain't that straightforward! But this here's another one that I don't really need... My spider's eyes are already really good! In my previous life, I was so nearsighted that I couldn't live without my glasses, but now I can already see waaay further than I could back then. Or, rather, I should say that this is another hundred-point skill.

Now that I think about it, there were similar skills for my other five senses, right? If I earned this sight-enhancing skill by staring really hard at something, will the other skills come if I focus really hard on my other senses?

So, let's try this out immediately. First off are my ears. What are a spider's ears like, anyway? There's so many things I don't know about myself.

Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Enhanced Hearing (LV 1)].

Ah, just as I'd hoped, I got a skill. So, let's work on the other ones.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Enhanced Smell (LV 1)].”

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Enhanced Touch (LV 1)].”

I'll handle my sense of taste the next time I eat something. Still, these skills were super easy to get, huh... Well, my spider senses are so good that I really didn't need to put any thought into them. If I don't actually focus on them, I won't get any skill proficiency, right? Otherwise, I would have earned these long ago.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Prediction (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

Already?! I literally *just* got this skill, right?! Why the heck did I just get another level? Ah, well, that's okay. I'm not going to turn away a free level-up.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Multitasking (LV 1)].”

Another one?! And, on top of that, one that might be useful for Detection, huh?!

Multitasking: *Allows the user to think about multiple things at once.*

I've been thinking that the big reason as to why I haven't been able to use Detection is that the sheer volume of incoming data overwhelms my ability to process it. So, I've been looking at skills that might bolster my processing power, and Multitasking is one of them.

Woohoo! ...How did I get this, though? I wasn't really trying to think about two things at once just now...

Ah, is it madame Appraisal? I've always been keeping her turned on. I've got a constant stream of information about my surroundings trickling into my head. I usually let it all pass through me because I don't usually care very much, but I guess you could describe that as thinking multiple things at once. I can't think of anything else that would have done that, so that must be it.

Nn... well, all of this... isn't this a little weird? I'm gaining way too many skills. No matter what the circumstances might be, getting skills one right after the other like this is definitely strange, right?

Well, I probably know what's causing this, though.

Pride.

"Drastically increases the rate of experience gain and skill proficiency gain." Yep. That's it. I mean, this is totally a massive multiplier on my proficiency points, right? I can't say anything for sure because I can't actually see the numbers, but this definitely looks like a multiplier.

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Prediction (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3."

See?

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *The original line involved metaphorical silk being gradually wrapped around a metaphorical head, unnoticed. I've swapped out the analogy.*

Chapter 67: A new foe has appeared! His name.

Detection!

Well then! At long last, I've finally acquired a new skill that might let me actually make use of Detection. Shall we try it out right away?

Inhale, exhale.

Alright.

Detection: on.

Groaaaah!

Too much! Too much!

Off! Offffff!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Multitasking (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Detection (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5.”

Inhaaaale... exhale. My head huuuurts. Ah, right. Multitasking is at level one. Based on all of my other skills so far, I really shouldn't have expected much from a level one skill. I didn't have any reason to think that this one would be different.

Multitasking's level did go up just now, but, well, so did Detection's. Nothing really matters if Detection's level goes up toooo... If it goes up, it's just going to throw even more information at me, so it's no gooood... If Multitasking and Detection keep leveling up at the same rate, I'm just going to get stuck in a loop.

Detection levels up so ridiculously quickly that I gain a new skill level every time I turn it on. I'm not even getting stuck in a loop, I'm getting left in the dust. And Pride is making it level even faster, too.

Man, seriously, this Detection guy. What a monster. I can't do anything at all about him. To think, I've had an enemy as formidable as the Earth Dragon lurking right beside me this whole time. I don't think I can win at aaaall...

Anyhow, for now, I'm going to have wait until Multitasking levels up, huh. I don't think I'm quite able to actually think about two things at once yet, but I might be able to grind up my proficiency by thinking something while simultaneously reading Appraisal results. I could, of course, grind it up using Detection, but doing it like that would be, well, backwards.

Grrr. Well, I don't think that my basic theory is wrong. I'm still pretty sure that if I were to somehow increase my mental capabilities, I'd then be able to use Detection. Although, out of all of the skills on the list, Multitasking really was the most likely candidate, huh...

Hmmmm. Let's check the list again. I've got fewer skill points than before, so there's fewer skills listed here. Even still, there's a lot to look through. I guess... most skills can probably be bought with only a hundred skill points, right? Excluding the really effective ones and the straight-up crazy ones, of course. Hmm, well, Pride is straight-up crazy and that somehow only cost me a hundred.

If I wanted to make Detection worthwhile, then the possible skills are...

Computation: Increases the computational power of the user's brain.

Memory: Strengthens the user's memory.

That's about it, huh? Fewer than I thought. On top of that, Memory seems like it might not actually apply very well. I guess that just leaves me with Computation, but am I really sure that I'd be able to use Detection with it?

Mmmm. Multitasking is in this sorry state, despite being the skill I thought best for the job, huh... Computation probably isn't going to be any better at low level, so buying it is pointless...

Ah, hang on. Computation is just math, right? Can't I just do a bunch of mental arithmetic and earn it that way?

Right. Well, it's not like I have anything more pressing to think about while I'm walking, so it doesn't hurt to give this a shot. Now then, shall we work out the powers of two?

Two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four...

...eight thousand, one hundred and ninety-two; sixteen thousand, three hundred and eighty-four; umm... thirty-two thousand, seven hundred and sixty-eight, right...? Man, this is getting tough. The next one is, ummmm...

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Computation (LV 1)].”

Oh! Good, good. Mission complete.

Hmmm. Should I give it a shot? It's probably not going to work, but if it does it'll be amazing, so... let's try it.

Inhale, exhale.

Alright.

Detection: on.

Grrabblaagh!!

Too much! Too much!!

Off! Offfff!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Computation (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Multitasking (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.” **“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Detection (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”**

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Corruption Resistance (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

Inhaaale... exhale. My head huuuurts. This is impossible. No can do. My head's splitting. Pain's bad.

Aaargh, no waaaaay... Hey, where the heck is Pain Tolerance? I thought I was going to die! Why'd you let me feel such unbearable pain?! Rather, why the heck did *Corruption Resistance* go up?! Could it be? Is the Dark Lord Detection literally attacking my very soul? “Attack” is the right word here, right? My resistance wouldn’t have gone up if it wasn’t.

Let’s be serious here. If Corruption Resistance went up, then Detection doesn’t just affect my thoughts, it’s also directly affecting my soul. Just maybe, is part of this headache coming from my soul?! Whoa, scary! Keeping this up isn’t going to wear my soul down or anything, right? I’d notice before it crippled me, right?

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Prediction (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

Ah, right. I’m so glad that Prediction doesn’t apply if I’m just deducing the right answer! Saaaafe. It’s just a prediction, so I’m saaaaafe. At least, that’s what I’m going with.

Hmmmm. So, does this mean that I’d be able to use Detection if I had skills that relate to the soul? There aren’t any soul-related skills on the list, though. Corruption Resistance is the only one I’ve got. Am I going to have to level it up? ...How the heck am I going to do that?

Ahhh. It’s no use. I’m just going to have to stick with my original plan of raising Multitasking and Computation. At the very least, their skill levels rose when I had Detection on, so they are doing *something* there.

So, for now, let’s seal Detection away again. Using it before I’m ready seems pretty scary now.

Chapter 68: The End of the Lower Depths

After I gave up for now on mastering Detection, I then turned to the thing I've been really waiting for: testing out my Spider Silk/Poison Attack combo. The results are... eh heh heh heh. Aaaahh, I really want to try this out in combat! Heh heh...

After that, I kept walking and walking. I didn't encounter any other monsters as I was walking, so everything was super peaceful. Thanks to having filled up Overeating, my stamina hasn't gone down at all, so not being able to hunt hasn't been a problem. So, the lack of any monsters made this the perfect chance to keep moving forward.

Since I was just walking, I had a bunch of free time, so I worked on grinding up the skills I could while I was moving. As a result, my sensing skills have gone up: Enhanced Sight, Hearing, Smell, and Touch are all up to level five. As a secondary effect, Concentration leveled up, and it's now at level eight. Concentration's always been relatively easy to level, but thanks to Pride's effects, it's gotten even faster.

Concentration really doesn't feel like it does much of anything, but it's actually a really amazing skill. I'm pretty sure that the only reason I was able to focus during that incredibly hectic life-or-death battle with those monkeys is because of Concentration. It may be a very plain skill, but it is a massively useful one.

So, now that my sensing skills are at level five, there's a huge difference in my capabilities. Everything that I used to be able to see is now so much clearer. If I focus, I can make out the details on the surface of the rocks far ahead of me. My sense of hearing and sense of smell are the same: I can practically hear every sound and detect every scent that floats around this labyrinth.

It's just... Enhanced Touch, well, you could say that it has its pluses and minuses. It makes me very sensitive... Ah, not in a sexy way, okay? Don't get your hopes up. If any of you idiots gets your hopes up anyway, I will personally wrap you up in silk and run you through with my Poison Fang until you die. *And*, if any of you brave souls are now going "but that would be the greatest prize of all," then, of course, I will run the heck away.

...Ahh, right, I was talking about Enhanced Touch. To be specific, it makes me sensitive enough that I can feel every air current as it flows past, which makes me really jumpy. I can get a little bit used to it after leaving it on for a while, but I'm pretty sure that I was supposed to get comfortable with it over time as it gradually leveled up. I must be feeling so uncomfortable with it because it leveled up so ridiculously quickly. Getting fully accustomed to it is going to take some time.

Well, it seems like I can turn it off, so when it gets to the point where I can't stand it, I think I'll do just that. Enhanced Smell, though, seems like it might be the skill I'm most likely to want to turn off in the future. I really would rather not have to smell something foul with an amplified sense of smell.

Now that I think about it, I don't think there's any reason why I'd even want Enhanced Taste. Everything in this dungeon is, well, disgusting. I have yet to meet a tasty monster. On top of that, there's things like those snail bugs, where even eating them normally is out of the question.

Oh, hm, I guess it's been a while since I've seen a snail bug. They were literally everywhere before those monkeys attacked, but now I can't see a single one around me. Where did they all go?

...Uggghh, on top of that, it's getting really hot. I wanna turn on the AC. Why is it that I, a girl who spent as much time as possible shut in an air-conditioned room in the summertime, am subjected to this kind of heat? I'm too frail for the heat and the cold...

...Hot...? Wait a minute, hot? In both the upper and lower layers, the dungeon has been a pleasant temperature, neither too hot nor too cold, so... hot?

I slowly take a look around my surroundings. There's not a single monster around me. I don't feel like I'm in any special danger... yet, I can feel a change in the environment.

I look ahead, along the wall. It's hard to notice, but, little by little, it seems like the floor is starting to slope upwards.

Up. Up! It's going up!! Aha, I did it! I finally, finally found it! Since it's going up... yeah, that's what's happening, right? Of course!

I'm climbing out of the lower levels and into the middle!

Yahoo!! I did it! This was the right path! Now I can finally escape these nightmarish lower depths! I don't have to constantly worry about the Earth Dragon anymore! Enormous swarms of monkeys aren't going to jump me out of nowhere! I don't have to constantly sneak through crowds of truly monstrous monsters, fearing for my life!

Before I knew it, I had started sprinting forward. As expected of a speed spec: I charged up the slope so quickly that even I was surprised by it. My yellow stamina bar couldn't hold out.

Pant, pant.

Ahhh. I may be fast, but I can't rocket forward at top speed, huh? That was a pretty big blind spot. I know that I can keep running if I really need to by drawing on my red stamina like I did when I ran away from those centipedes, but I should take note of this as one of my weak points.

Regardless, I'll be at the top of this hill soon. Waiting for me at the top is the middle layer, which I've only ever seen in my dreams.

It's been a long road to get here. I fled from a snake, tripped up, fell down here to the lower layer, and have been running away from danger ever since. Those wasps almost killed me, the Earth Dragon almost killed me, I barely made it out of the den of all those dangerous monsters, the taste of those snail bugs almost killed me, and those monkeys almost killed me. I've done nothing down here but nearly get killed. Good job on staying alive, me. Haven't these events been a little too drastic? I think something good, without any downsides, might have finally happened!

Farewell, lower depths! Hello, middle layers!

At the top of the hill, an endless plain of red-hot magma and scorching earth stretches into the distance.

Chapter 69. The Middle Strata of the Great Elro Labyrinth

Uh, uhhhhhhhhhhhh...

Whaaat the heeeck?

I... don't get it.

WHAT THE HELL?!

This is pointless! This is unbelievable!! This is idiotic!!!

Magma?! Why the heck is there *magma* flowing in a *dungeon*?! Oh, it's a dungeon, so that makes sense... no! No! *How?!*

Hot! It's not just air conditioner weather anymore, it's scorching hot!!¹ Whoa, did my health just drop a point?! Is it literally hot enough for me to lose HP? Whooooa, zones with area damage are no joke... And while I was saying that my health dropped another point.

There does seem to be a path I can follow to avoid the magma, but continuing on from here seems pretty impossible, right? I'm not even close to the magma where I am right now, yet I'm still taking damage. My health is going to evaporate if I have to walk anywhere close by. And if I'm that close, there's a chance I might accidentally touch it...

No waaaaay. I finally make it out of the lower depths and this is what I get? I can't think of a single way that I could get through this area.

Hm? I see a monster off in the distance. Enhanced Vision may be simple, but it gets the job done. Well, it looks like that monster is swimming placidly through the magma. Just seeing that is a little terrifying, but still, Appraisal result, please?

Elro Generash² — LV 7

Statistics:

HP: 167/167 (green)

MP: 145/158 (blue)

SP: 155/155 (yellow), 156/165 (red)

Avg. Offense: 85

Avg. Defense: 83

Avg. Magic Power: 81

Avg. Resistance: 79

Avg. Speed: 89

Failed to appraise statistics.

Eh? Madam Appraisal? Is this just in my imagination, or have you added something new to your display?

Oh... ohh!! You're amazing, Madam Appraisal! Until now all I've been able to see is a target's health and such, but now you're showing me things like their attack power! Your success rate probably still isn't 100%, but I can use this information to accurately pinpoint my opponents' strengths! Cooool. This is amazingly cool. Knowing my opponent's strengths is going to be a huge advantage.

On top of that, if things are going in order, isn't the next thing going to be showing me their skills? If I know their skills, my enemies' information is practically stripped bare before me! That owns! I'm gonna own! Aaargh, it's going to be a while before I get the next level thooooough...

So, it's great that I noticed how amazing Appraisal is now, because that monster isn't strong at aaaaall. It looks kinda like a seahorse that grew arms and legs, but it's swimming freely through the magma... Unbelievable.

Rather, I say that it's not very strong, but it's stats are basically on par with mine. My physical stats are pretty low across the board, except for my speed, and magic is basically

a dump stat since I can't actually use any magic. As for my speed, I know well that I don't have enough instantaneous stamina to run at top speed for long periods of time. Running causes my yellow gauge to rapidly vanish, and when it hits zero I get painfully winded. I really don't have any edge when it comes to a head-to-head fight.

Well then, let's check out the double-appraisal result...

Elro Generash: *A low ranking species of drake, native to the middle strata of the Great Elro Labyrinth. It can manipulate flame, and uses it to defend itself.*

Found it! The middle strata of the Great Elro Labyrinth!

The Middle Strata of the Great Elro Labyrinth: *The area of the Great Elro Labyrinth that sits between the lower and upper strata. The entire area is covered in flowing, red-hot magma, and it is inhabited by many monsters resistant to fire.*

...Seriously? Whoooooa. No waaaaay. The entire middle strata is like this? I'm going to have to go through this to get back to the upper levels? That's impossible, right?

I get damaged by the terrain just by being here. Rivers and ponds of magma cover the earth, and I'm dead in an instant if I fall into one of those. And, it's not at all unreasonable to think that the fire-resistant monsters living down here are going to be able to use fire themselves. You remember the one big weakness of my spider silk, right? *Fire!!*

Let's step back a bit. If you take away my silk, what do I have left? My venom and my speed. Well, at least I still have something, but it's really going to suck not being able to use the strongest weapon in my arsenal. Really, I'm not even going to be able to finally try out my poison thread! I've been looking forward to using it so much! Why are you doing this to me?

Ah! My health is getting seriously low. Let's go back take some cover.

Fwoooof. Back to the lower depths, at the bottom of the slope. It's still pretty hot here, but at least my health isn't going down anymore. If I rest for a bit here, Automatic HP Recovery will be able to fix me back up.

Although... I do have Automatic HP Recovery, don't I, but the damage still kept accumulating... It's going to be impossible no matter how hard I push forward, isn't it? If I want to beat this, I need to stock up on potions and Cool Drinks, right? I don't have any of those, though.

If I were to get Fire Resistance, would this get easier? But... if my silk is weak to fire, then my body's probably weak to fire too. I noticed it back when I was looking at the skill list, but, Fire Resistance wasn't on the list. That means that I can't actually buy it with just two hundred points, right? There were plenty of other resistances on the list, but no Fire Resistance. This is just a theory, but maybe, if I'm weak to fire, then it might be hard for me to acquire Fire Resistance.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Prediction (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5.”

Ah, right. You really do level up quickly, don't you? This is probably Pride's effect, huh.

Well, let's put that aside for a bit. What the heck do I do now? I want to get back to the upper layers, so I have to beat this. However, I can't think of any way that I actually can.

Then, is there another way I can get up there? I know at least one other way: going back and climbing up the shaft where the wasps are. Going back to where the Earth Dragon is lurking, though?

Nope.

No can do.

No way.

So, maybe I should search for other shafts? Are there even any other convenient shafts like that?

I can't say that there aren't. Back in the upper layers, a wandering wasp did get caught in one of my webs, so it's possible that it flew up out of a different shaft, where the wasps have made another nest just like the first one. This is, however, still only a possibility.

Do I try to charge my way through the middle strata, or do I search the lower depths for a shaft that might not even be there? Hmm, what should I choose...

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *The original line is “it’s no longer just hot (暑い), “atsui”, which is used to describe hot weather), it’s hot (熱い), also “atsui”, which is used to describe hot things, like fire)“.*
2. *Pronounced with a hard G.*

Chapter 70: The Training Part

For the time being, I'll build a nest between the lower and middle strata. I'm not in any hurry, after all. I don't think even the Earth Dragon is going to follow me this far, and I don't think anyone will bother me if I build my nest near the ceiling, like I did before those monkeys attacked.

After reflecting back on that attack, I've decided that I'm going to make a really solid nest, instead of a simple one. My goal is to build something that'll be all right even if another giant monkey were to throw a boulder at it. Thankfully, I have a huge stockpile of red stamina after eating all of those monkeys.

Then, using this nest as my base of operations, I'm going to, little by little, make preparations for conquering the middle layer. Specifically, I'm hoping to acquire Fire Resistance as well as grind up the level of Automatic HP Recovery. In order to do that, I think that I should go up into the middle stratum, let my health be depleted, and then return home, and then repeat that several times per day.

Taking damage in there is likely going to help me gain proficiency in either resisting fire or resisting heat. I don't know how long it would take, but I should eventually earn either Fire or Heat Resistance. Plus, after I take all of that damage, Automatic HP Recovery will activate, giving me even more proficiency and killing two birds with one stone. If my defense and my recovery are enough to exceed the incoming damage, then I should be able to walk around just fine.

When I'm not doing that, I'll train up my other skills. I'd like to train up both Multitasking and Computation if I can, but I actually have no clue how to work on Multitasking so I think I'll leave it alone for now. Computation is easy enough to raise, I just need to keep doing mental arithmetic.

I don't particularly want to waste any of my mana recovery, so I think I should work on leveling both Thread Manipulation and Poison Synthesis. I've actually been coming up with new ways to use Poison Synthesis, so I really want to concentrate on getting its level

up. Thread Manipulation isn't going to be particularly useful in the middle strata, though... Even though it's one of my core skills...

After that, I should put some effort into these stat-boosting skills. Kartikeya, Greater Strength, and Greater Toughness all increase my stats on level-up, so I want to give those extra priority. Although, while I know I can run to train Kartikeya and do push-ups (er, leg-ups) to train Greater Strength, how do I train Greater Toughness? It's a defensive skill, so do I really have to get hit by an attack? Hmm. Maybe, when I'm training Thread Manipulation, I should try whipping myself. I really hate pain, but I should at least try this once.

Next thing, if I'm going to stay here for a while, I'll need to secure a source of food. Right now, my red stamina isn't decreasing at all thanks to Overeating, but I will eventually need to eat something. So, I should probably do some patrols of the area and make sure I have everything I need to go hunting. Or, maybe I should put up some webs to catch things? A spiderweb trap with threads as invisibly thin as I can make them. Yeah, that's a good idea! I'll do that. Even if I accidentally wind up snaring a monster that's powerful enough to rip through my silk, it's not like I'm going to be in the area, so I won't really be in any danger.

Now that that's decided: commence the operation! The first step is to build a home. I crawl my way up the wall. After that life-or-death struggle with those monkeys, I've built up quite a resistance to heights, huh... I used to be scared to the point that I got levels in Fear Resistance, but now I don't feel a thing.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [3-D Maneuvering (LV 1)].”

Hm? Oh, I got a new skill, huh. Show me, show me.

3-D Maneuvering: *Allows for the execution of movements in three-dimensional space, such as running along walls or landing on ceilings.*

Ha hah... Worthless. I can already do that! Well, maybe when I level it up it'll get more useful, so it might be to early to call this worthless, but it's not an important skill at all. I'm just gonna leave it alone...

Right. Got a questionable skill, now it's time to build this home.

Whew. Alright, done. The completed home rests between the wall and the ceiling, stretched waaay out horizontally. I originally wanted it to be a lot more balanced, but the quality of the ceiling rocks changes partway out, becoming too slippery to adhere any silk to. I couldn't stretch it very far forward along the ceiling, so it ended up in a shape like this.

Since it's so spread out, I'm not very satisfied with how thick its surface is. I was aiming for something that could protect against a giant monkey's rock throw, but I don't think this'll quite be able to stand up to that. However, my foundation is very strong, and I've protected everything against falling. Even if a hundred monkeys cling to this, it won't fall! Unless a foe has a ranged attack to rival the giant monkeys', breaking into this home is going to be very difficult. Even still, this isn't strong enough to protect me from any abnormally powerful monsters like the Earth Dragon, so I can't quite relax entirely. I'll be living here freely for the time being, so I'll be using this nest as My Home #4.

Now then, I've secured my position and filled my health back up. Let's go back up to the middle layer and start working on getting my health down again! ...This is going to suck...

As mentioned earlier, I have arrived in the middle strata! It is very hot! The temperature right now is, frankly, unmeasurable, as I do not have a thermometer! The forecast for today indicates a devastating wave of lava! The conditions out here are such that this weather reporter must not remain out here for very long! This has been a live report from the middle strata! *Retreat!*

Whoooof. That was hoooooot. Neither of my skills leveled, either. Well, I'll get to this at my leisure.

Julius Story 1: The Hero and the King

“I brought you this, Father,” I say. “It’s a local wine from the Budie province.”

“Ohh. I’ve never had this one before. I wonder how it tastes? I’m looking forward to it.”

In this spotlessly clean room that nevertheless has official documents and papers jumbled up everywhere, I have just presented my father with a bottle of wine I brought back for him as a souvenir. My father loves liquor. Usually, when he works alone, he performs his duties while sneaking drinks. By now, it’s become something of an open secret.

As such, whenever I return from a foreign land, I make sure to bring him a rare or unusual bottle of alcohol. As the King, my father can’t go off visiting other countries on a whim, so even a simple gift such as this makes him very happy. It’s also become a bit of a tradition for the two of us to enjoy it together.

“Father, is it alright for you to take some time off now?”

“No problem at all. If something comes up, I can shave off a little bit of my sleeping time. My son, who I so rarely get to see, has finally come home, and that’s far more important.”

I smile wryly. He said that so flippantly, but the work of a king is no easy thing.

“Besides, Cyrus has gotten quite used to his duties. If something ever happens to me, the country is in safe hands.”

“Father, my brother may be very skilled, but this country still needs its King. Please do not say such ominous things.”

My father sighs, apologizing offhandedly. He walks over to a bookshelf, retrieves two of the glasses he keeps hidden there, and pours some wine for both of us.

“Hmm, what an unusual aroma!”

“Yes. I selected it because I particularly liked its fragrance. I think you’ll be quite pleased by it.”

A mellow aroma fills the room. We clink our glasses, then tip them down our throats.

“Hmm!” he says. “This goes down quite smoothly. I feel like I could drink this forever.”

“It’s quite popular with the women of the region, you know. They say that the taste is greatly enhanced if you drink it while eating fruit. Please, have some of these.”

I offer him the fruits that I had prepared. He puts one in his mouth, then takes another sip of wine.

“Delicious. I usually drink such strong liquor, but drinks like this are great from time to time.”

“I thought you’d like it.”

Inwardly, I breathed a small sigh of relief. I had been worried that my father, who likes much drier liquors, wouldn’t like this wine. I can now put those needless worries behind me.

We continued to drink in silence for a while. Suddenly, I remembered something from earlier this afternoon, and my jaw drops.

“What is it?” asks my father.

“Well, I went to see how Sue and Shun were doing this afternoon. I was just remembering what happened then.”

My little brother and sister have so much talent that it even shocked me, the Hero. I sparred with Shun as part of his training, and it was remarkably difficult to keep my composure. I shouldn’t have tried to show off by fighting with one hand. Next time I spar with him, I’ll make sure to use both of my hands.

“Hmm! How are those two doing, in your opinion?”

“They have a terrifying amount of talent, Shun especially so. If he had been born just a little earlier, then the title of Hero might have fallen on his shoulders instead of mine.”

This is the complete truth. Really, in terms of raw talent, Shun and Sue are both far, far ahead of me. The reason why my stats are still so much higher than theirs is because of the effects of my Hero title. They still wouldn't be able to beat me at the moment if I didn't have the title, but they'd be able to surpass me very soon. They possess such incredible talent. They might even manage to overtake me, even with my Hero title. I hope that doesn't happen. If it does, my pride as an older brother would be shattered into pieces. Shun, especially, seems to respect me a great deal, and seeing him disillusioned would be too much of a shock to bear.

This is a grave situation. I should redouble my training efforts, so that they don't catch up to me. Right.

“What are you nodding to yourself about?” asks my father.

“Well, it seems that it is not so simple to maintain one's pride as an older brother.”

Come to think of it, Shun seems to be maintaining the same sort of dignity around Sue, and it seems to be working very well. She really clings to him, and acts like she views me as a rival for his affections. One day, she'll grow apart from him, but for now it's extremely cute that she gets so mad when her beloved older brother is peeled away from her.

“I've done those two a terrible disservice,” says my father, bitterness floating across his face.

The two of them were born just after the previous Hero had met his end. At that time, I was the one to receive the title of Hero. The previous Hero died unexpectedly, his location unknown and his actions mysterious, and the title fell on me. Suddenly, the monsters began to move in great numbers. My father, as a result, had no time to spare for his two youngest children. Even though he believes family to be precious, his duties as a king come first. He had no choice but to prioritize the needs of his country, and this weighs heavily on his mind.

“You did what you had to do,” I said. “So many things were happening at once, you didn't have a choice.”

“But those two have never hugged me once. That seems like a clear answer to me.”

“It will be alright. They will understand, in time.”

“If only...”

With a sad look on his face, he swirls the wine in his glass, then, with a heavy, heavy sigh, spills out his pent-up feelings.

“To be honest, there are times I find being king very depressing. It’s not just those two kids. Julius, I worry about you as well. I never wanted my son to have to shoulder the burden of being Hero. Yet, as king, it is my duty to tell you to go. It may be the right choice for me as a king, but it makes me a failure of a father.”

“Father. I am proud of being the Hero. Please, do not say things. If you take being the Hero away from me, what do I have left?”

“That’s not true.”

“But it is. I don’t have my older brother’s skill or education in politics, nor do I have Leston’s penetrating faith, nor can I marry into another family like my sister can. The only thing I can do is to be the Hero of the people, to swing my sword in defense of humanity. Please, Father, do not worry about me. I am, for my own sake, doing what I am meant to do, and doing my very best at it.”

“Leston’s really just doing whatever he pleases, though.”

“He really is.”

The two of us let out a chuckle.

Father, from where I stand, you’re an amazing father. So, in order to be as helpful to you as I can, I’ll continue to be the Hero.

Chapter 71: Leveling

Leveling my skills so far took a lot of work. ...Wait, no, these went up on their own. The last time I really settled in to focus on leveling a skill was back when I made my first home, and then I really didn't work on anything but Spider Silk...

I have way more skills than I did back then, and, best of all, Appraisal's level has jumped way up. In other words, I'm in a great position to do some very efficient leveling.

On top of that, now that I can see the skill list, I've tried finding skills I thought I could acquire and doing things that I thought would earn skill proficiency. Thanks to that, I've acquired quite a few new skills. Maaaan, Madam Appraisal, you really are the greatest. You're really a cheat skill when it comes to skill acquisition.

Also, in order to secure provisions, I set a few traps around the area. They're super simple, just a few super-sticky threads spread around on the floor, but when a monster steps on one, it gets stuck. I left those alone for a while, then checked back on them occasionally. The result: I successfully caught something! It was pretty weak, so I put an end to it quickly.

And, in doing so, I finally was able to show my Poison Silk to the world! It's silk imbued with poison, and it's surpassed Severing Thread as my strongest attack. Man, this is amazing. It's seriously amazing. It's seriously amazing, but I don't know if I can use it in the middle strataaaa... how unfair.

Also, I leveled up.

“Huh?” you ask? Don’t. I had that reaction already.

After all, isn’t it *weird* that I would have leveled up after defeating just one small fry of a monster? I was pretty surprised. This looks like another bonus from Pride, and a pretty effective one at that, if I leveled from a single weak monster.

After that, I caught a few more monsters, just as I wanted. Thanks to that, I haven't run out of food at all, nor has my stamina been going down. There's evidence that a few monsters managed to break free of my traps, but, honestly, that's fine with me. I really don't want to meet the monsters that are strong enough to tear themselves out of my stickiest threads. Thanks to that, the only monsters left in my traps are the safe ones, so I can dispatch them with a smile on my face. All the levels I got are way exhilarating, too.

After doing all that stuff, my stats are looking a little like this:

Small Poison Taratekt – LV 5 – (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 83/83 (green)

MP: 181/181 (blue)

SP: 82/82 (yellow), 82/82 (red)

Avg. Offense: 92

Avg. Defense: 92

Avg. Magic Power: 135

Avg. Resistance: 168

Avg. Speed: 830

Skills:

[Automatic HP Recovery (LV 5)] • [Accelerated MP Recovery (LV 3)] •
[MP Consumption Reduction (LV 2)] • [Accelerated SP Recovery (LV 2)] •
[SP Consumption Reduction (LV 2)] • [Damage Enhancement (LV 1)] •
[Slashing Enhancement (LV 1)] • [Poison Enhancement (LV 2)] • [Battle Spirit (LV 1)] •
[Willpower Allocation (LV 2)] • [Greater Poison Attack (LV 3)] • [Poison Synthesis (LV 7)]
• [Thread Talent (LV 3)] • [Spider Silk (LV 9)] • [Severing Thread (LV 6)] •
[Thread Manipulation (LV 8)] • [Throwing (LV 6)] • [3-D Maneuvering (LV 3)] •
[Concentration (LV 9)] • [Prediction (LV 8)] • [Multitasking (LV 4)] •
[Computation (LV 6)] • [Aiming (LV 7)] • [Evasion (LV 3)] • [Appraisal (LV 8)] •
[Detection (LV 6)] • [Stealth (LV 7)] • [Hell] • [Corruption Magic (LV 3)] •
[Shadow Magic (LV 2)] • [Poison Magic (LV 2)] • [Abyssal Magic (LV 10)] • [Pride] •

[Overeating (LV 7)] • [Night Vision (LV 10)] • [Visible Spectrum Expansion (LV 2)] • [Damage Resistance (LV 1)] • [Bashing Resistance (LV 2)] • [Slashing Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fire Resistance (LV 1)] • [Greater Poison Resistance (LV 2)] • [Paralysis Resistance (LV 3)] • [Petrification Resistance (LV 3)] • [Acid Resistance (LV 4)] • [Decay Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fainting Resistance (LV 2)] • [Fear Resistance (LV 6)] • [Corruption Resistance (LV 3)] • [Ignore Pain] • [Pain Tolerance (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Vision (LV 8)] • [Enhanced Hearing (LV 8)] • [Enhanced Smell (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Taste (LV 4)] • [Enhanced Touch (LV 6)] • [Vitality (LV 7)] • [Mana Pool (LV 8)] • [Alacrity (LV 7)] • [Endurance (LV 7)] • [Greater Strength (LV 3)] • [Greater Toughness (LV 3)] • [Resistance (LV 3)] • [Kartikeya (LV 3)] • [Taboo (LV 4)] • [n % I = W]

Skill points available: 180

Maaan, I got *strong*. Seriously. With stats like these, wouldn't I be able to fight upper-layer monsters head-on?

I've seen this before in my stats, but it really looks like there's a variety of ways to bring up your stats without having to level up. I went running for a while to work on boosting my skills, and thanks to that training my stats have gone up as well. It looks like it's the same as in my previous life: if you train hard, you'll get stronger. I've got a stats screen in this world, though, so it's way easier to see the effects.

And, plus, the stat increases on level up are now double what they were before! You might be asking me what the hell I'm talking about, but I seriously don't know what's happened! No, well, it's probably Pride again. When I leveled, my speed increased by a whopping 42 in an instant. That really startled me. It looks like the "increase in the rate of stat growth" that Pride gives me literally doubles the increases that I get from my other skills. Pride, you're seriously an amazing skill...

My skills have also gone way up in level. Look at the poison-related ones! Did you notice? Poison Attack became Greater Poison Attack¹ and Poison Resistance became Greater Poison Resistance! That happened when those skills hit level ten. I was amazed to find out to find out that skills have evolutions too. The effect seems to be a straight upgrade of the

previous skills' effects. It looks like these are going to be my main weapons in the middle strata, so these evolutions are a huge deal.

Eh? Why'd Poison Resistance go up, you ask? I've been regularly whipping myself with Poison Silk, you know. Really, if I didn't do that, then the level wouldn't up, right? I can endure a little bit of pain if it's for the sake of my skill levels. Anyone would do the same. I did it, after all. Huh? I'm the only one? Nah, no waaaay. ...Probably.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. Originally, “Deadly Poison Attack”, but I’m continuing to translate upgraded versions of skills as “Greater” to keep with Western RPG conventions and to prevent skill names from being obfuscated unnecessarily.

Chapter 72: The Fruits of Leveling

Also on the topic of poison, Poison Synthesis leveled up as well. It's gotten up to level seven by now, and I've got even more of both the kinds of poison I can synthesize and the attributes I can adjust.

Poison Synthesis Menu

Weak Poison

Poison

Strong Poison

Deadly Spider Venom (LV 3)

Damage adjustment Duration adjustment

Contact damage adjustment

Synthesis volume adjustment

Thanks to leveling up Poison Attack, my Spider Venom has now become Deadly. I did also pick up both Poison and Strong Poison, but these are simply poisons that are stronger than Weak Poison. Deadly Spider Venom is obviously even better than those, though. Sorry, guys, but Deadly Spider Venom's the only one of you that'll see the light of day in combat.

However, there's new customization options! "Contact damage adjustment", as its name implies, adjusts how much damage a poison can do just from touching you. It's how I control external damage, while the "damage adjustment" option lets me control internal damage when a poison's ingested or injected. There's no real need for me to adjust my Deadly Spider Venom, however, since its damage is already way higher than I can modify with Poison Synthesis.

"Synthesis volume adjustment" lets me control the amount of poison that I can synthesize at once, albeit at the cost of additional mana. I tried it while I was leveling, and it's super convenient. As long as I don't mess up while using it, I can instantly create a tremendous

amount of poison to inflict on my enemies. *Drown in my sea of venom!* I'll shout, as I rain down a torrent of toxin on my helpless foes...

My non-poison-related skills also leveled up quite a bit. I was able to pick up a variety of skills relating to my mana and stamina. For my mana, I got Accelerated MP Recovery and MP Consumption Reduction. Just as advertised, my natural mana regeneration has gone up and my expenditures have gone down. Same thing goes for stamina too, with faster recovery and lowered costs. The faster recovery, though, only applies to my yellow gauge. The cost reduction looks like it applies to both yellow and red: when I sprinted around at full power to try it out, both gauges seemed to be going down less quickly. (The red gauge actually didn't go down at all, thanks to Overeating, but the good lady Appraisal helped me confirm the result.)

Damage Enhancement is, uh, pretty OP. It multiplies the damage of anything you do to destroy something. "Something" includes, of course, other living beings. In other words, all of my attacks are being significantly strengthened. Damage Resistance is the defensive skill on the other side of the coin. Both of these skills are scary good, so I worked hard to make sure I picked both of those up.

Slashing Enhancement and Poison Enhancement are skills that boost attacks that use their corresponding attributes. It's a pretty simple way to boost both my Severing Thread and my poison.

Battle Spirit is a pretty weird skill. It burns stamina from my red gauge to boost all of my physical stats. It's what you'd call a toggled buff, but it drains a *ton* of stamina while it's on. My red stamina is my lifeline, so there's nooo way I'm eager to use it up like that. This skill isn't very efficient, either, so I'm going to save it for when I'm backed into a corner. Way into a corner.

Grant Vitality is similar to Battle Spirit, but it targets an external object, not myself. In my case, I'd use it on my silk. Again, though, I'm not going to wind up using it, for largely the same reasons as Battle Spirit.

My biggest score in the silk department was a skill called Thread Talent. It's a super convenient skill that applies a flat bonus to everything I do involving threads, like making my silk stronger or easier to work with. Since it's just a straight boost with no downsides, I put it to work immediately.

Throw and Aiming both went up, too.

I didn't do anything in particular to work on leveling 3-D Maneuvering, but climbing up the walls to get to and from my home has caused it to gradually level up.

Multitasking and Computation haven't really gone up at all, but it really can't be helped. I'm still waiting on deliberately grinding it up.

On the other hand, Concentration and Prediction have both gone up quite a bit. I don't really care much about Prediction, but Concentration's hit level nine! Level ten can't be far off. Based on the other skills so far, Concentration will either evolve into a new form or derive a new skill once it hits level ten. I wonder which it will be? This has been a super useful skill so far, so I'm really expecting its evolution—or derivation—to be good as well.

No change to my magic skills.

As for my resistances, my constant literal self-flagellation has gotten me Damage Resistance, Bashing Resistance, and Slashing Resistance. On top of that, I also managed to finally pick up my long-desired Fire Resistance. After all of this effort, I finally made it to level one. Automatic HP Regeneration has also leveled up a bunch, so my future's looking pretty bright.

Next, I boosted most of my sensory-enhancing skills. I've left Enhance Taste aside for the time being. It, uh, really doesn't seem very useful in a dungeon like this.

I also ground up my stat-boosting skills. After constantly raining poison attacks on myself, I got a new skill called Resistance, which, well, strengthened my Resistance stat. It went up even further when Poison Resistance evolved into Greater Poison Resistance! I don't

really know exactly what the link is, but it may be that my Resistance stat goes up when a resistance skill gets added.

It's been a real pain to try to level Greater Strength, Greater Toughness, and Kartikeya. They really haven't gone anywhere. Seriously, I ran and ran and ran to try to grind up Kartikeya, and I only managed to get a single level. Compared to the rest of my stat-boosting skills, these are waaay more difficult to level. Well, I guess it's only natural, since these skills are way more powerful than the others.

Now that I know how skill evolution works, I really want to get the rest of my stat-boosting skills up to level ten as quickly as I can. They might have evolved forms too.

Alas, I was unable to further raise M'lady Appraisal to any new heights. I think that I haven't been able to get very much skill proficiency over the last few days since my actions have been so constrained. If that's the case, I really should start moving towards clearing the middle strata.

By now, I'm more-or-less able to stand the environmental damage of the middle strata. I tried it out to be sure, getting as close as I could to a magma pool, and it seems to work. It takes everything I've got to just barely mitigate it, though. If I take any other damage while I'm in the middle layer, leveling up is the only way I'd be able to heal it. I really want to spend some more time on my skills just to be extra-safe, but I *really* want to earn some more proficiency for the Lady Appraisal's sake...

Hmmmmmm. I'm torn.

Chapter 73. Suddenly, a death flag!

Alright! Let's get to the middle strata. Carpe diem! Seize the day! With my Speed stat as high as it is, I should be able to run past any enemies I might encounter. Plus, I've been able to keep moving despite life-threatening wounds before now. I'll never get anywhere if I'm afraid of stubbing my toes.

Regeneration has spoiled me. This is clear.

Under ordinary circumstances, I'd want to spend some more time leveling, but... I dunno, I have a feeling that I really should get out of here quickly. I'm getting really fidgety and restless.

And so, today I depart, leaving behind my fourth home! Farewell, home number four! You have treated me well. Take care of yourself!

In that instant, my fourth home is abruptly blasted apart.

I'm blown away by the shockwave. I hit the ground rolling, and manage to come to a stop about halfway up the slope. I glance at my health bar, but it's only gone down a little bit. I'm lucky; I made it out relatively unscathed since I was already outside, but... what would have happened if I was still in there?

My eyes alight on the creature that started this fiasco.

The Earth Dragon, Kagna – LV 26

Statistics:

HP: 4198/4198 (green)

MP: 3339/3654 (blue)

SP: 2798/2798 (yellow), 2995/3112 (red)

Failed to appraise statistics.

It's a dragon. Compared to the other Earth Dragon, Alaba, that I saw before, this one looks kinda shorter and stouter. It looks very strong. Also, it has no wings.

Nnnope. I get right the heck out of there, charging up the ramp at maximum speed. I reach the top in record time and just keep running. I burn through my entire bar of yellow stamina, but I just keep running. I push my legs so far past their limit that they start screaming in agony. This is excruciating, but still, I just keep running. I weave around the streams of magma, running as fast as I can along the few bits of solid ground.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [SP Consumption Reduction (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Alacrity (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Endurance (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8.”

I don't know how far I've managed to run, but my legs have finally just given out. I want to do nothing more than collapse on the floor and just lay here forever, but I scrape together all of my remaining willpower and force myself to turn around. Behind me, there's no sign that the Earth Dragon has followed me at all.

That was cloooose... I look around to make sure that there's no monsters immediately nearby, then flop down to the ground.

Aaaaaahh... No waaaaay... An Earth Dragon attack, in broad daylight, with no warning or provocation whatsoever? No freaking waaaaay. I could have died. If I'd been even an instant later in leaving my home, I *would* have died! Things only turned out like this because I had that uncomfortable premonition.

Seriously, though, what the heck was that? Are Earth Dragons compelled to fire their breath weapons at every single cobweb they see? That's freaking scary. I didn't pay much attention, but... do the Earth Dragons make their lair in the lower strata? That's freaking scary. ...Wait, no, let's not think about a place with a bunch of Earth Dragons lying around.

I think back on the stats I saw from Appraisal, and how every single one of them was *four digits*. That's pretty freaking ridiculous! There's no way I could have won. On top of that, it had mana and stamina to spare after using an attack that straight-up obliterated my home. That thing wasn't single-shot! It could fire it as much as it wanted!

Impossible. What a monster! Earth Dragons are terrifying.

On top of that, that new Earth Dragon seemed to be a totally different variety than the Earth Dragon Alaba that I saw before. The new one had a lower level than Alaba did, but I wasn't able to Appraise Alaba back then so I have no way to compare the two to see which is stronger. That doesn't change the fact that it isn't even remotely possible for me to beat either of them.

Alaba and Kagna are both described as Earth Dragons, so they must be related somehow, right? Maybe they started out as the same species, but then they took different branches when evolving. Ahhh, that might be it... Dragons are the creme de la creme of powerful monsters, it's only natural that they'd have many evolutionary forms.

Or, if that's not it, maybe each Earth Dragon is its own unique species? Huh, that might be it too... Since they're high up on the evolutionary ladder, there aren't going to be very many of them, but they'd have to be pretty strong, huh? ...Yeah, those guys are *definitely* strong, with stats like those. So, if there's so few of them, the odds of running into them must be very low...

Wait. If that's the case, getting attacked by not just one, but *two* Earth Dragons has to be extremely unlikely. Is my luck really that astronomically terrible?

N... n-n-n-no waay that can be true, r-r-right? I've always managed to come out on top, even though I've been in so many situations that were so hopeless I thought I was going to die, so my luck must be good, right? Huh? You're telling me someone with actual good luck wouldn't be in mortal peril so often? Hmm?

...Let's not do this. Let's just put the brakes on this particular train of thought.

Man, I was a hair's breadth away from disaster, there. I'm so glad I didn't decide to stick around and level any more. I haven't been able to shake off my bad luck yet. Let's just leave it at that for now. Someone, please agree with me?

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Prediction (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9.”

Who the hell asked you?! What's with that timing! Were you just waiting to make that quip?! Hey, so-called “Voice of Heaven”, you think you're some kinda comedian now?!

Hoooof. I got way too riled up about such a stupid thing.

Right. I've had probably the worst start to this possible, but let's start working through conquering the middle strata. I want to get as far away from the Earth Dragon as I can.

Chapter 74: Middle strata conquest. commence!

Right, then, first thing's first, let's verify my current condition. I'm currently surrounded on all sides by bubbling, seething magma. The ratio of magma to solid ground is, hmm, probably about fifty/fifty. I kinda blitzed my way through to this particular spot, but am I even going in the right direction? Well, right or wrong, I have no clue. All that I can do right now is keep going forward.

So, I'm still feeling the aftereffects of that Earth Dragon attack. After sprinting for so long even after I was well past my limit, my health has gone down a bit. Ordinarily, a tiny bit of damage like this wouldn't be a big deal, but in a scorching-hot place like this I'm constantly taking environmental damage. My automatic recovery is only barely keeping up with this constant damage, so any additional damage I receive isn't going to be able to heal at all. In order to recover, I'm either going to have to wait for the full heal on a levelup, or hope that either Fire Resistance or Automatic HP Recovery levels up and tips the balance of damage and healing more in my favor.

Although, it *is* entirely possible that getting super close to the magma would be even more unbearably hot, and the amount of damage I'd take would be even higher. I'd really like to avoid super-hot places whenever possible, but I dunno what's coming down the bend...

Based on what the upper and lower strata were like, I'd bet that the middle strata is going to be pretty huge. This is, after all, the world's greatest dungeon. This place is big enough that it connects two continents together! I need to steel myself for the possibility that I'll be stuck here for days. Man, this journey's going to be long, and I'm already just crushed. This isn't a good sign.

Right, so, let's get going.

Hrm. It really is hot, though... Before I was reborn as a spider, I lived a super comfortable, climate-controlled life without ever being too hot or too cold. This kinda extreme temperature shift is really making me sluggish... It's not like I can't handle the heat at all; I did keep coming back up here while I was trying to level up Fire Resistance, after all. But

still, when I think about how I'm going to be stuck in this heat for soooo long before I finally get out of the middle strata, I really do get kinda worn down.

My feet in particular. There's magma flowing all around nearby, you know? The ground is, of course, going to be scorching hot. And not scorching hot like the asphalt in the middle of the summer. If you tried to fry an egg on *this* sidewalk, it would just burn. And I have to walk on it! Barefoot! This is way more painful than just plain "hot".

Oh, great, a monster.

Elro Generash – LV 5

Statistics:

HP: 159/159 (green)

MP: 145/148 (blue)

SP: 145/145 (yellow), 116/145 (red)

Failed to appraise statistics.

Ah, it's one of the ones I saw when I first came up here. The seahorse-looking ones. Just like back then, it's calmly swimming around in *molten rock*. No waaaay.

It looks like it hasn't noticed me yet, but the direction it's traveling in is going to put it right on the path that I want to go through. What should I do...?

Hmmm. Maybe I should fight it? I've been wanting to figure out just how effective my silk still is in this heat, but if I still have to fight it head-on, I'm pretty confident, based on the stats I saw just now, that I can beat it.

My foe is right in front of me and it doesn't seem like any other monsters are rearing their ugly heads, so...

Let's give it a shot.

My target hasn't noticed me yet, so let's give it a good pre-emptive strike. Come on, Severing Thread!! I let out a long length of silk, then whip it horizontally in front of me. Since the seahorse wasn't paying any attention to my silk, I aimed right for its head, but my silk simply burned up as it passed over the magma. Fire races up the thread back towards me, and I frantically sever the rest of the thread before I catch fire myself.

Awww, mmmmrgh... Man, is this just hopeless? My silk caught fire without even touching the magma directly. Is my silk seriously going to be completely ineffective in the middle strata? Aaaaargh, seriously... I've really been stripped of my strongest weapon...? I'd known this was possible but I'm still kinda stunned.

Oh, something's flying this way! It's a fireball, huh. That'll hurt if it hits... but that's big enough that I'll get burnt to a crisp if it hits me, right?

Whoop!

I dodge. I dodge it completely! Oh, but it fired a second one.

Whoop!

The seahorse is spitting fireballs at me from within the magma. Hmm. At the speed they're traveling, there's no way they'll hit me. I may have not been able to dodge that frog's acid spit so long ago, but now my Speed stat is way higher *and* I have an Evasion skill! I'm far more powerful than I was before. Even my speed-specced MMO character is no match for my god-tier evasive ability! I may be made of paper, I may be burned to a crisp in a single hit, but they're never going to actually hit me!

This, however, is, uh, kinda pointless. Neither of us can really do anything. My foe can't land a single fireball on me, and there's no way for me to attack it at range without my silk. We're at a stalemate.

Ah, no, the seahorse's mana is gradually being used up. I guess that fireball attack costs mana? That would mean that it would run out of fireballs once its mana is fully depleted.

Lady Appraisal, you truly are OP. You can tell me all I need to know about my enemies in mid-combat!

Alright, I've dodged the last fireball. Now, that thing's mana pool is completely empty. Its next move will decide the outcome of this battle, but what will it be?

Ah! It crawled out of the magma. And it's charging this way.

What a moron.

If I were in its shoes, I'd be making a strategic retreat right now.

I avoid its charge with room to spare. To my eyes, it's practically moving in slow motion. I latch onto its back as it passes, stab my claws deep into its flesh, and fill it full of venom with my Poison Attack. This thing's super hot, though! My health went down a bit! My precious, precious health!

Regardless, the seahorse, violated by my deadliest toxins, crumples to the ground and rattles out its last breath. Hmm! My debut fight was a resounding success. Though... it seems like, here in the middle strata, my greatest foe is the terrain itself.

Chapter 75: There's things that are totally fine when you do them, but can't stand when people do to you, right?

I avoid some incoming fireballs. Two of them. Well, dodging two at the same time isn't any huge problem for me. I glance towards their origin and see two seahorses.

It would seem as if this area is packed full of seahorses. Everywhere I look, the magma is infested with them. They aren't really swarming together; they're just kinda wandering about, doing whatever they want to do, but if several of them wind up in the same place, they'll wind up attacking me all at once. Well, these seahorse squads aren't anywhere near as large as the monkey army that attacked me, so this is actually really easy.

I dodge another fireball. These guys don't usually interact with each other very much, so their teamwork is kind of poor. They're just kinda firing off fireballs whenever they feel like it. If you guys don't work together, you're never gonna actually hit me, you knoooow!

It's just... there's *that*. It's depressing. They aren't playing fair, staying in the magma. There's no way for me to actually affect them at all, so this bombardment is reaaaally one-sided. Can't you guys fight me fair and square? Don't you think you're being a little too cowardly? Don't you have any sense of pride?

Hm? My own medicine? I have noooo clue what you're saying. I don't understaaaand. I'd neeeeever do anything that cowardly, you know? I'd neeeeever hide in my nest and attack with impunity, you know? Look at me, I'm such an upstanding and forthright maiden, seeee?

That's right, you know?
Say it. "That's right."

Well, really, these guys aren't shut completely away like I do when I'm in my nest. Look! One of them just ran out of mana. Here it comes!

For some completely unknown reason, these seahorses never retreat back into the safety of the magma. Instead, they come at me directly, no matter the cost. They do say that an emperor should never flee, so do these guys think they're awesome enough to be emperors? Hmm, maybe, they are a little dragon-like, after all. Anyway, when their mana runs out, they climb out of the magma and physically charge me.

After that, it's my game.

I dispose of it immediately with my venom-clad forelegs. The timing's great, too, the other one crawls out of the magma and I deal with it in the same way.

“Experience requirements met. Small Poison Taratekt, you have grown from level 5 to level 6. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Poison Enhancement (LV 2)] skill has been raised to level 3 and your skill [Evasion (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Oh! Ding!! I'm grateful for just the full heal alone. I molt quickly, and my health is fully restored.

It's not very difficult to defeat these seahorses, but every time I touch them I take a little bit of damage. It's no big deal when it's just one of them, but when I have to fight them over and over, the accumulated damage is no laughing matter. Right now, I can't recover any health unless I level up, so I don't want to take even the tiniest bit of damage. Incidentally, I can eat these things as long as I give them a little time to cool down first.

I really would have liked my Fire Resistance or Automatic HP Recovery skills to have leveled when I did, but I guess the world just isn't that nice. Fire Resistance is still stuck at level one, and Automatic HP Recovery hasn't budged at all. I guess I can't do anything about Fire Resistance's lack of growth. After all, it seems like my species is very weak against fire, so trying to overcome that weakness in a single day is definitely asking too much.

Automatic HP Recovery is an extremely useful skill, so of course it levels slowly. Well, auto-healing is usually a pretty lategame skill. To have gotten a skill like this naturally without having to spend skill points on it, and then expecting it to level quickly on top of that is really just being greedy. Getting it in the first place is a blessing in and of itself.

Really, without Automatic HP Recovery, I don't think I'd even be able to try to make it through the middle strata. It'd just be impossible. Charging through an area that constantly deals environmental damage to you without any way to heal that damage is just straight-up suicide. I'm reeeeally not interested in killing myself, otherwise I'd still be in the lower strata, looking for a pit to climb up.

Y'know, the lower strata, where the Earth Dragons live.

Welp, another seahorse. If I keep going this way, it'll see me, oh noooo. If I wanted to run way, I probably could, but that's, uh...

Maybe I should try throwing rocks, like those monkeys did? It's probably better than just doing nothing. I can't really hold a rock with my spindly spider legs, but I could stick some silk to it and hurl it like that.

Let's test this out immediately. First, I need to find a decent rock... yeah! There's a decently-sized one. Let's roll it over here, stick a thread to it, and... Hummm, hummm, hummm, WHOOP!

Oh! It hit. That was probably thanks to Throwing and Aiming, huh? Though... it didn't really seem to do much damage. Ah, here comes the counterattack. Another fireball.

After that, we traded rocks and fireballs back and forth for a while, but the seahorse did eventually run out of mana, crawl up on shore, and turn this into a land battle. Hmmmm. This is better than doing nothing, but it's not like it's really doing much of anything... Well, if I'm just fighting one of those things, throwing rocks might still be useful. I can grind up Throwing and Aiming, probably. If there's two or more, though, I really should focus on evasion. Getting hit by one of those fireballs would be no joke.

Side Story 11: Daughter of the Elves

My father has summoned me. Not just me, but Katia as well. Neither of us have any idea as to why this could be, so we both tilt our heads to the side and ponder.

“This is just a wild guess,” says Katia, “but... maybe he wants to talk about betrothal?”

“Huh? Whose?”

“You know... yours. And mine.”

I am completely and utterly flabbergasted by Katia’s ridiculous idea.

“No... no way.”

“Yeah, dude, seriously, it would be way too weird for us. But look at it from everyone else’s perspective. We look like a boy and a girl of similar age and pedigree who get along very well. If they *weren’t* thinking about marriage it would be weirder.”

When she puts it like that, it doesn’t seem to be that strange of an idea. I am a prince of the royal family, and she’s the daughter of a duke. It’s a good balance, socially.

“But, are you okay with that?” I ask.

“No fucking way, dude. I can’t even *imagine* being married to a man. But it’s gonna happen sooner or later, so we should really be prepared for it, right?”

“Man, I never thought you’d think about stuff like that.”

“Whoa, rude. But, practically, I’d honestly rather be engaged to you than to some random guy I don’t actually know. You know about my current situation, so when it comes down to it we can make a scene and call the whole thing off.”

Ahh, there’s that ploy too. I honestly haven’t been thinking about a fiancée up until now, but since I am a son of a royal line, it really would be weird if the question just never came up. It really would be convenient, then, to be engaged to someone like Katia, since we have no actual romantic attraction to each other.

There’s just one problem, though.

“Hey, what are we going to do about Sue, then?”

“Ah.”

Yeah. My little sister Sue doesn’t allow anyone to get close to me at all. She’s let her guard down a bit around Katia, but I have no idea what she’ll do if the topic of betrothal comes up.

“Yeah,” says Katia, “I think she might just kill me.”

“That’s an exaggeration, right?”

“...It might not be.”

Sue has grown up to be one of *those* kinds of girls, but I don’t think she’d really go that far.

Meanwhile, two more people have entered the waiting room, a man and a young girl. When Katia and I notice the two of them, our jaws drop in shock. These two people have far longer ears than any human.

“Prince, Lady, good day to you,” says the man, in an indifferent tone. “I am Potimus Hyphenas, the elven ambassador to this country. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintances. It is I who have called you here.”

This is my first time meeting an elf. I knew that elves existed, but seeing a real live one in front of me is a stark reminder of the fact that we live in a fantasy world.

He squints at us, and a strange, uncomfortable feeling ripples through me. “Hmm! You do indeed possess it,” he says.

“Oka,” he says to the girl beside him, “these two both have it. I’ll leave them in your care.”

“All ri~ight! Leave them to me~!” she says, cheerfully.

“Now, I must take my leave,” he says, turning towards the door and quickly walking away.

“Thanks for all the he~elp!”

The door shuts behind Potimus, leaving me and Katia completely dumbfounded. We hadn't even had time to introduce ourselves before he hurried out of the room. With no idea what to do, I turn towards the little girl he left behind.

"Hmm, hmmm~! Let me introduce myself. My... current name is Filimes Hyphenas~! It is my pleasure to meet you~!"

Katia and I glance at each other. This strange little girl had just introduced herself, but now we had no idea what to do next.

"Your teacher just introduced herself, so it's only polite for you to do the same, you kno~ow! Who might the two of you be?"

"My apologies," I hurriedly say. "I am the fourth prince of this country, Slaine Zagan Analeicht."

"I am the daughter of the duke of Anabald, Carnatia Seli Anabald." "Hm, hm! A prince and a duchess! Spec-tacular! I'm burning up~!"

I stiffen in my chair. The quirky way she's been talking, her choice of words, her conduct... they're very much like someone I know. Next to me, Katia has come to the exact same realization, and our eyes go wide.

"No way, Oka?!" we yell.

"A~hem, you should call your teacher *Miss Okazaki*, you know~? But you're right!!"²

The individual in front of us is Oka, aka Kanami Okazaki, our homeroom teacher from the previous world.

The teacher we had nicknamed Oka was really quite a deplorable individual. When she was a student, she got really into a particular manga and started imitating how her favorite character talked, and did it for so long that it became her normal speaking voice. She read a lot of manga set in the Warring States period of Japanese history, so she arbitrarily decided to go into the history program at a very prestigious university. She then decided to become a teacher after drafting the Reverse Hikaru Genji Plan¹. A thoroughly deplorable

teacher indeed. However, her students really loved that deplorable personality, so she was an incredibly popular teacher.

“So, Miss Okazaki, why have you come to this country?”

“Because I’d heard the two of you were he~ere. You’re everywhere in the news, you know? Several genius prodigies born in the kingdom of Analeicht all at once!!”

Having met our teacher from the other world after all this time, we switch to talking in Japanese, and tell her our old names. When she hears who Katia was, her eyes go wide and she squeals, “I’m burning up~!”

“You came all this way just to see us?”

“No, no, not just tha~at. I mi~ight look like a little elf girl, but I’m still your teacher! Of course I wanted to make sure my beloved students are all safe, you kno~ow! Well, if ‘safety’ really means anything after we’ve been reincarnated~!”

She might be acting like it’s a joke, but I think she’s really sincere about it. Since I came here, I haven’t been thinking about anyone’s life but my own. It never occurred to me that I should seek out my other classmates.

“This world’s also wa~ay more dangerous than Japa~an! I need to find you all sooner rather than later so that I can make sure you’re safe, you know~!”

That’s another thing that I hadn’t even considered. There’s monsters in this world! It’s an easy mistake to make, but since I was so safe, I just arbitrarily assumed that the rest of my classmates were safe too.

“So, Miss Okazaki, have you come to protect us?”

“No, no! You two have such lofty positions that there’s no~o way you’d be able to just walk out of here. The others are normal people, though, so all they needed to do was ask if they wanted to seek shelter in the elven village~!”

“So, that means you’ve found some of the others already?” “Ye~ep! Twelve people are already in the elven village, and we’ve been in contact with five more students, including you two~. We’ve been able to find two more of you, so they’re the next stop on my tri~ip!

Our class had twenty-five students. So this means that there are six students that still haven't been located at all. On the other hand, however, that means that *only* six students haven't been found. In such a huge world as this, finding as many people as she did must have been an enormous amount of work.

"Miss Okazaki, you're working so hard for our sakes," I say.

"Of course I am~, It's my duty as your teacher! Plus, most of you guys have been in the human lands, so it's not like getting to you guys was ha~ard!"

Even so, it is obvious that Miss Okazaki has been putting a tremendous amount of work into this. I bow to her once more.

"We~ell," she says, "I'm sure we have a lot to talk abo~out, but I'm going to be enrolling in the academy here soo~on! I'll be expecting a detailed account from both of you then~!"

Katia and I will also both be enrolling in the academy shortly. Our new lives are coming at us quickly.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. This is a reference to *Hikaru Genji*, the protagonist of *The Tale of Genji*, a piece of classical Japanese literature. Assumedly, the "Hikaru Genji Plan" is a recreation of the part of the story where he, a grown man, raises a young girl with the intent of marrying her. The Reverse Hikaru Genji Plan would seem to involve a grown woman (the teacher?) raising a boy to marry.

1.1. God **damn**.

2. Miss Okazaki speaks in Japanese by drawing out the last vowel of literally e~every sentence. It's pre~etty aggravating to read! I've tried to preserve as much of the tone as I possibly ca~an!

2.1. God **da~amn!**

Chapter 76. Turn up the heat!

My runthrough of the middle strata is going pretty well. I've encountered a few other species of monsters besides just seahorses, but none of them were really worth mentioning. If it weren't for the environmental hazards, there's no way I'd lose. Really, all of my problems come as a result of the environment.

First off: magma. What a pain! If my opponent hides in the magma, I can't do anything but hurl rocks at them, which does barely any damage at all. Practically, I can't do anything at all to them if they don't crawl up onto solid ground.

It's great when they act like the seahorses do and just blithely hop out of the magma when they run out of mana, but there's some monsters that stay put in the magma and, even worse, some who just run away. There's also the ones that start out on solid ground, but then dive into the magma to flee when I corner them.

Not being able to use my silk at all is another huge pain. I'm able to use it for things like throwing rocks around, but it'll always catch fire eventually, even if it just sits on the ground. The biggest problem here is that my body constantly produces silk whenever I move, laying down a thread wherever I go. In here, this thread catches fire. The flames then race up the line like a fuse, straight towards my increasingly hot butt. This is, by the way, not a metaphor. The first time it happened, my butt literally caught fire, causing me to run around in panicked circles. That cost me a lot of health. I managed to put myself out, but at even greater cost. I doused myself with liquid from the only source I had: Poison Synthesis.

Ever since, I've had no choice but to constantly stop and cut off the line that I'm unconsciously laying. If I don't do that, my butt will be on fire. Not metaphorically.

Sleeping is another problem! Ideally, I'd build a nest to sleep in, but a nest would obviously catch fire in this environment. I had no choice but to abandon that hope and instead try to sleep in the shadows of large rocks.

Try, of course, being the operative word here. I'm trying to sleep in the middle of a scorching hell, constantly scared of being crept up on by a monster. No matter how brazen and bold I may be, guts can only get me so far. However, sleeping is a must. I haven't exactly been getting any *good* sleep, but whenever I find a suitable rock to hide under I do try to lie down for a while.

Well, even though the environment is much rougher up here than it was down in the lower strata, this place's one redeeming quality is that the monsters are so weak. It doesn't feel like there's much of a difference between the monsters here and the ones back in the upper strata. There could, of course, be a middle-strata equivalent to the unusually powerful snake that was in the upper strata, but for now every monster I've met has been weak.

The biggest difference between upper- and middle-strata monsters seems to be how well they use the terrain to their advantage. Thanks to that, all of the relatively weak monsters here are way tougher to kill than they should be. Seriously, I don't mind at all when it's me who has the environmental edge, but it is such a pain when my opponents have it instead.

Well, there's a lot of things to dislike about this place, but I don't think it's entirely impossible. My sheer diligence in leveling has made me quite a bit stronger. If I keep facing enemies like these, I'm still able to win even despite the disadvantage. However, since I still don't have very many ways to heal myself, every hit I take puts me in a bigger pinch. Carelessness is forbidden.

Besides, there's still one more thing that's particularly troubling about the monsters down here.

Ahead of me, I see three of them.

Elro Pyeku – LV 8

Statistics:

HP: 164/164 (green)

MP: 166/168 (blue)

SP: 175/175 (yellow), 176/181 (red)

Avg. Offense: 137

Avg. Defense: 123

Avg. Magic Power: 121

Avg. Resistance: 117

Avg. Speed: 143

Failed to appraise statistics.

Elro Pyeku – LV 8

Statistics:

HP: 163/163 (green)

MP: 169/170 (blue)

SP: 174/174 (yellow), 170/183 (red)

Failed to appraise statistics.

Elro Pyeku – LV 8

Statistics:

HP: 166/166 (green)

MP: 169/169 (blue)

SP: 177/177 (yellow), 178/182 (red)

Failed to appraise statistics.

These things look kind of like bright red dogs. They're actually kind of cute on the outside, but these jerks are actually *really* nasty, especially when it comes to dealing with me.

First of all, their noses are incredibly good. Like, y'know, dogs. They aren't even the slightest bit affected by my Stealth skill. As a result, I'm never able to attack them by surprise like I usually do. ...Well, I haven't been able to do that much in the middle strata anyway, but that's not important.

The next thing, though. Their bodies are covered in flame.

That's right! These dogs aren't just colored red, they're on fire! It's not like I can do anything to them while they're set ablaze like that. Just touching them directly would deal me a ton of damage. That's the biggest problem with middle-strata monsters: their bodies are all extremely hot.

Even if they're not always on fire like the dogs are, their bodies are still dangerously hot to the touch. The seahorses are like that, for example. So, whenever I touch them, I take damage. I can endure it when I have to kill the seahorses, but the amount of damage I'd take from killing something that's literally on fire wouldn't be something I could just shrug off.

I've had to come up with a few countermeasures of my own.

I dodge the dogs as they charge at me. They may be decently fast, but compared to my speed it's like they're moving through mud. Dodging them is no trouble at all.

I weave around the first two dogs, then leap high over the third. As I soar over its head, I activate Poison Synthesis.

Smothered by my powerful venom, the dog stumbles, falls, and skids to a stop. Not only is my venom especially deadly, but it seems like none of the monsters in this area have any levels in Poison Resistance. So, defeating these things is a piece of cake: just pour toxins on them until they stop moving. I don't have to touch them at all, so there's no need for me to take any damage.

My venom puts the two remaining pitiful dogs out of their misery.

Chapter 77: Unlucky number seven

I've got a baaad feeling. The seahorses, you see, are "drakes".¹

Drake: *A species of monster considered to be an inferior form of a dragon. While they may be considered inferior to dragons, there do exist drakes that can rival a dragon in power.*

Yeah. A monster that's an inferior form of something like that Earth Dragon. Putting it in system terms, it's, what, a Fire Drake? Since there's an Earth Dragon, there's got to be a Fire Dragon, huh... There can't be anything like that in the middle strata, can there? I really hope not.

Well then, I kind of let my mind escape from reality for a little there, but let's switch focus to the problem that's right in front of me.

Elro Geneseven – LV 7

Statistics:

HP: 461/461 (green)

MP: 223/223 (blue)

SP: 218/218 (yellow), 451/466 (red)

Avg. Offense: 368

Avg. Defense: 311

Avg. Magic Power: 161

Avg. Resistance: 158

Avg. Speed: 155

Failed to appraise statistics.

Elro Geneseven: *A low-ranking species of monster, related to the drakes, that inhabits the middle strata of the Great Elro Labyrinth. It is omnivorous, and will swallow anything with its enormous mouth.*

This monster is swimming lazily around in the magma. It may be some kind of lesser drake, but from where I'm standing it really looks more like some kind of catfish. Also, it doesn't really give off the kind of vibe that I'd expect off of a creature with "seven" in its name. Well, it's not like I can do much about this world's naming conventions, even if I have a problem.

Its defining characteristic really does seem to be its enormous mouth, just like a catfish. Man, there's no waaaay getting swallowed by that thing is going to turn out well for me. At my size, I think I'd fit in there quite nicely.

Appraisal did a great job getting me this guy's stats. Generally, it seems that Appraisal's success rate for getting detailed stats is something like one in three. I'm really lucky that this was the one that hit. Charging in at this catfish without a solid understanding of its stats would have been extremely dangerous. I've only ever seen weak monsters here in the middle strata, but this catfish is way stronger than the rest.

If possible, I'd like to pass straight through here. However, that catfish is swimming very close to the path I'd like to take. Based on all the trends so far, getting caught up in a battle is pretty likely.

Hmmmm. What do I do...? Well, I did consider that running away could be an option thanks to my incredible speed, but that thing's huge red stamina gauge means that I might be in real trouble if it decides to keep pursuing me forever. Its yellow bar is smaller, but "small" is a relative term; it's over twice the size of my own. Plus, I can't see any of the skills it has... If it maybe has Automatic SP Recovery at a high level, then it would be the worst monster I could possibly try to run away from. Well, this is still all in my head, though.

It looks like it would be pretty good in a fight. I should really run away, right? Yeah. I shouldn't do anything rash. I've been on a roll lately, but I've definitely had a lot of really painful experiences after getting too cocky. Even I can learn from experience! I'm not going to get carried away here. I'm going to proceed with caution and modesty.

So, on that note, let's start slowly moving forward. If it spots me, I'll take off at maximum speed.

Suddenly, another catfish rises from the depths and breaks through the surface of the magma with a splash, very close to me.

Huh? Whoa?! That's not right! I didn't get carried away at all but I still got myself into this much trouble?!

The catfish and I lock eyes. For a brief moment, we stare blankly at each other, then it opens its enormous mouth.

Backstep!! The catfish's mouth closes on the spot where I was just a moment ago. It came up on land so casually. This guy... I didn't notice them before since they were hidden beneath the magma, but this thing's got arms and legs! On top of that, it's covered in dragon-like scales! Its defense stat really is high.

Yeah.

Time to go.

Guh?! When I turn to the path I want to escape along, I see that the catfish I saw earlier has crawled up onto the land as well! In a place like this, how am I supposed to run away from a pincer attack?!

What do I do?! Uhhhhh, in times like this I've got no choice: I need to take down the catfish right in front of me, now!

I wrap my Poison Thread around the catfish. Even if it's going to burn immediately, please, just get a little bit of poison applied! It, of course, burns up immediately. I glance up at the catfish's health indicator, trying to figure out if my poison had any effect. Sure enough, the catfish's health has gone down by just a little bit. It looks like poison is indeed effective. So, my next step is to administer some poison.

The catfish opens its mouth wide as it immediately starts to charge towards me. WhhoaAA! That was close!! But I still nailed it! I stood my ground until the catfish was right on top of me, then used Poison Synthesis and just barely managed to make it away unscathed! By a razor's edge!

Its mouth snaps shut on a big glob of poison instead of on me. Instantly, its health starts to plummet at a rate that is seriously no joke. And, just as you'd expect, the catfish is writhing around on the ground in agony. Ohh! My poison's getting pretty good, isn't it...

Now, who's next?! I glance around, looking for my other opponent, and see that it has just straight-up bolted after watching its comrade meet such a terrible end. O... oh. I guess that it's only natural to think that I'm super dangerous, after watching your ally fall so quickly and painfully. I never thought that a drake would ever try to escape, but I guess that might just be those seahorses.

So, just like that, the healthy catfish turns around and flees back the way it came. Seriously...? I thought I was going to be the one running away from this. There's no waaaay I would have thought that I'd see my enemy fleeing instead. Is... is it okay if I get a little carried away, now? I'm really tough now, right?

Next up, I put an end to the poisoned catfish by splashing more venom on its face with Poison Synthesis. It convulses once more, then lies still.

“Experience requirements met. Small Poison Taratekt, you have grown from level 6 to level 7. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Concentration (LV 9)] has been raised to level 10, your skill [Evasion (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5, and your skill [Vitality (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8. Your [Concentration (LV 10)] skill has reached its maximum level, and a new skill, [Accelerated Thought (LV 1)] has been unlocked. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Hm? When I leveled, it looks like Concentration maxed out.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. I'm translating 童 as "drake" and 龍 as "dragon". Both characters actually just mean "dragon", and they're read the same, but 龍 has a somewhat more impactful feel to it. Drake, in this sense, is in the Dungeons and Dragons sense of the word: drakes are dragon-like creatures, but generally weaker.

Chapter 78: ...What an amazing skill

Concentration hit max level, which I was actually kinda looking forward to. Let's use Appraisal and check out the new derived skill that I got.

Accelerated Thought: *Accelerates the speed of the user's thoughts, expanding the user's perception of time.*

...What an amazing skill.

No, isn't it actually even more unbelievable than that? Its practical effect is, uh, *that*, right? Making time appear to slow down, right? Like that thing that top-class athletes say they get sometimes, where they can see the ball moving in slow motion, right? Does this let me activate that whenever I want? That's absurd, right?

Let's try it immediately. Hmm... No problems turning it on. So, how does it feel?

Hmm? Doesn't it look like the magma is moving a just little bit more slowly? There's also some kind of uncomfortable sensation. All of the sensations in my body feel... kinda fast and kinda slow at the same time. It's really strange, I don't think I can really describe it. To test it out, I try moving my body. It feels... weird, somehow, kinda like I'm moving underwater. Like my body is lagging just a little behind my thoughts. So, this what Accelerated Thought's like by default, huh... I've definitely gotten carried away by my own speed before, so maybe I should activate this when I run at top speed.

...Huh? Uh, is this actually costing me anything? Neither my mana or stamina are decreasing at all. So, is this maybe a passive skill, designed to be always on by default? It seems like I can turn it on and off, but is there any downside to leaving it on all the time? Man, isn't this amazing?

I was totally expecting this to cost me mana. Like, it would cost me some mana and would only last for a few seconds at a time, something like that. I can have it on anytime, anywhere, for no cost? Isn't this a ridiculously unbelievable skill?

There aren't any real downsides. If I had to dig for one, I'd maybe say that this laggy sensation is going to be kind of uncomfortable until I get used to it. Man, I think I've seriously managed to stumble on an amazingly OP skill!

Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Prediction (LV 9)] has been raised to level 10. Your [Prediction] skill has reached its maximum level and has evolved into a new skill, [Foresight (LV 1)].“

Oh, see ya, Prediction. Now that I think about it, I guess you were also just a little ways away from maxing out. Well, you were a pretty useless skill, so let's see if your evolved friend is a little more useful, huh?

Foresight: Strengthen's the user's predictive abilities. Furthermore, allows the user to see the possible outcomes of the immediate future.

Hm? Possible future outcomes? What do you mean?

Well, first off, let's activate it. Hmm. This one went on without problem either. But, what actually changed?

Ah, wait. The magma's movements look a little weirder now. Did it get a little bit blurry, here and there? Wait, no, it... looks like a bunch of images are stacked on top of each other. Are these stacked-up sections what the description was calling possible outcomes?

This is what you'd call seeing the future, right? Well, it's not something that I can trust entirely because they do say it's a prediction, but if I train this skill up enough it might turn into something *really* useful. There aren't very many spots where the magma looks stacked up right now, so I don't really see this being very useful right now.

Huh? Wait, hang on, hang on. This isn't costing me anything either? Is... this another passive skill? ...What an amazing skill.

I never would have thought that such a good-for-nothing little brat as Prediction could turn out to be such an amazing treasure trove. Forgive me, Prediction. Even worthless kids can make something of themselves if they try hard.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9.”

The former worthless kid makes her appearance! Madam Appraisal! What, may I ask, will this level up bring? Please, allow me to see for myself immediately!

Small Poison Taratekt – LV 7 – (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 88/88 (green)

MP: 185/185 (blue)

SP: 88/88 (yellow), 88/88 (red) +612

Avg. Offense: 109

Avg. Defense: 108

Avg. Magic Power: 139

Avg. Resistance: 173

Avg. Speed: 956

Skills:

[Automatic HP Recovery (LV 5)] • [Accelerated MP Recovery (LV 3)] •
[MP Consumption Reduction (LV 2)] • [Accelerated SP Recovery (LV 2)] •
[SP Consumption Reduction (LV 3)] • [Damage Enhancement (LV 1)] •
[Slashing Enhancement (LV 1)] • [Poison Enhancement (LV 3)] • [Battle Spirit (LV 1)] •
[Willpower Allocation (LV 2)] • [Greater Poison Attack (LV 3)] • [Poison Synthesis (LV 7)] •
[Thread Talent (LV 3)] • [Spider Silk (LV 9)] • [Severing Thread (LV 6)] •
[Thread Manipulation (LV 8)] • [Throwing (LV 7)] • [3-D Maneuvering (LV 4)] •
[Concentration (LV 10)] • [Accelerated Thought (LV 1)] • [Foresight (LV 1)] •
[Multitasking (LV 4)] • [Computation (LV 6)] • [Aiming (LV 8)] • [Evasion (LV 5)] •
[Appraisal (LV 9)] • [Detection (LV 6)] • [Stealth (LV 7)] • [Hell] • [Black Magic (LV 3)] •

[Shadow Magic (LV 2)] • [Poison Magic (LV 2)] • [Abyssal Magic (LV 10)] • [Pride] • [Overeating (LV 7)] • [Night Vision (LV 10)] • [Visible Spectrum Expansion (LV 2)] • [Damage Resistance (LV 1)] • [Bashing Resistance (LV 2)] • [Slashing Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fire Resistance (LV 1)] • [Greater Poison Resistance (LV 2)] • [Paralysis Resistance (LV 3)] • [Petrification Resistance (LV 3)] • [Acid Resistance (LV 4)] • [Decay Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fainting Resistance (LV 2)] • [Fear Resistance (LV 7)] • [Black Magic Resistance (LV 3)] • [Ignore Pain] • [Pain Tolerance (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Vision (LV 8)] • [Enhanced Hearing (LV 8)] • [Enhanced Smell (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Taste (LV 5)] • [Enhanced Touch (LV 6)] • [Vitality (LV 8)] • [Mana Pool (LV 8)] • [Alacrity (LV 8)] • [Endurance (LV 8)] • [Greater Strength (LV 3)] • [Greater Toughness (LV 3)] • [Resistance (LV 3)] • [Kartikeya (LV 3)] • [Taboo (LV 4)] • [n % I = W]

Skill points available: 220

Titles:

[Filth Eater] • [Kin Eater] • [Assassin] • [Monster Slayer] • [Poison User] • [Silk User] • [Merciless] • [Monster Slaughterer] • [Lord of Pride]

O... ohhh!! I can see my titles, now! I have been keenly interested this for a while now.

Also, what's this number next to my red stamina gauge? Is this my Overeating stock, maybe? Man, I've got a lot of that. No wonder my stamina never goes down.

Now then, shall we start appraising all of my titles?

Chapter 79. What do you mean, I'm a spider full of sinister titles?

Now that the good Lady Appraisal can give me information about my titles, let's get right to the details.

Title: *Enhancement code that may be obtained by fulfilling special requirements. Upon acquisition, may grant up to two skills. Some titles may include special effects or provide statistical bonuses.*

Huh, really... Titles don't just grant me a couple of skills. I really did think that was all they did. Ooh, that might mean that my titles give me bonus effects that I just didn't notice before. I'm really starting to look forward to this Appraisal spree. Now then, *let's go!!*

Filth Eater: *Granted skills – [Poison Resistance (LV 1)] and [Decay Resistance (LV 1)]. Acquisition criteria – Consume a significant amount of poisoned or otherwise fouled material within a set amount of time. Effect – Strengthens the holder's stomach. Description – A title awarded to those who eat nothing but poison.*

Ah... yeah. Ah, yes, that *is* right, everything I have been eating since I was reborn *has* indeed been poisonous in some way or another. So, I guess I can't really complain about being called "Filth Eater". Or, rather, it did make my stomach stronger... Well, I have been eating a lot of poison things, so I guess it was unexpectedly kinda useful, even if I didn't know it. Filth Eater also gave me Decay Resistance, so I'm very grateful that it spared me from instant death that one time I tried eating a snail-bug. I'm just... not happy about the name.

Kin Eater: *Granted skills – [Taboo (LV 1)] and [Corruption Magic (LV 1)]. Acquisition criteria – Devour a blood relative. Effect – None. Description – A title awarded to those who have eaten their kin.*

Effect: None. Was there any real meaning behind earning this? No matter how you think about it, this is a title you absolutely don't want to acquire, right? It gives you a rank in

Taboo, which seems to be a detrimental skill. Sure, it also gives Corruption Magic, but I have no idea how that actually works so I can't really count that as a plus. Right now, this title is doing nothing but dragging me down...

Assassin: *Granted skills – [Stealth (LV 1)] and [Shadow Magic (LV 1)]. Acquisition criteria – Achieve a set rate of success in executing surprise attacks. Effect – Provides a damage bonus to the first strike of a surprise attack. Description – A title awarded to those who repeatedly assassinate their targets.*

Ohhhh! The skills were already assassin-like, but this bonus effect really sells it. This is a ninja title. There's no mistake: ninjas are assassins too. Am I going to eventually be able to sneak up behind someone and decapitate them barehanded? Oh, well, for me, "barehanded" includes the claws on my forelegs, so I thiiiink I might actually be able to do it already.

Monster Slayer: *Granted skills – [Strength (LV 1)] and [Toughness (LV 1)]. Acquisition criteria – Slay a certain number of monsters. Effect – Increases the damage dealt to monster opponents. Description – A title awarded to those who have defeated many monsters.*

Ahhh. so it really is based on the number of monsters you murder, huhhhh... I don't really have an accurate idea of what the "certain number" is for the requirement, but I'd killed quiiiite a few monsters by the time I got it. The effect is pretty tasty, too, so I'm pretty happy overall with this result.

Poison User: *Granted skills – [Poison Synthesis (LV 1)] and [Poison Magic (LV 1)]. Acquisition criteria – Use a certain amount of poison. Effect – Strengthens the holder's Poison attribute. Description – A title awarded to those who use poison.*

My first ridiculously useful title. I am unbelievably grateful for Poison Synthesis. Now that I see it, the effect is amazing as well. It's like this title was made just for me. If I could actually use Poison Magic, then I'd have zero complaints at all. Hmm, the acquisition criteria just says "use a certain amount of poison," I wonder if the potency doesn't actually have any effect? If that's the case, then it makes sense for why it took me so long to get the

title, despite me constantly using poison attacks from the day I was born. I wouldn't have needed very much poison at all to meet that threshold, otherwise, since my own venom is so powerful.

Silk User: Granted skills – [Thread Manipulation (LV 1)] and [Severing Thread (LV 1)]. Acquisition criteria – Perform a certain number of attacks using threads. Effect: Strengthens the offensive power of the holder's threads. Description – A title awarded to those who wield thread as a weapon.

My second ridiculously useful title: a title that massively powered up my main weapon. ...Except I can't use it at all in the middle strata!! Regardless, I've got a good handle on it now that I can see the acquisition criteria, effects, and description: this is a title for people who *attack* using thread. Me, though, I use my silk mostly for its adhesion, huuhhh... I wonder if that counts more as an attack or more as support. Because, you know, it took me a really long time to get this title, too, so maybe webs and traps don't get counted as attacks. Did I only start earning points towards it when I started using things like the Silken Smasher and my throwing nets? If I'd known about this earlier, I could have picked it up a looooot more easily.

Merciless: Granted skills – [Corruption Magic (LV 1)] and [Corruption Resistance (LV 1)]. Acquisition criteria – Perform truly merciless actions. Effect – Prevents the holder from feeling guilt. Description – A title awarded to those who have shown no mercy.

That's kind of vague. Put a little more effort into your explanations, please. What does that acquisition criteria even mean? Hmm... this effect, too, is really questionable. The entire thing is questionable, really.

Monster Slaughterer: Acquired Skills – [Greater Strength (LV 1)] and [Greater Toughness (LV 1)]. Acquisition criteria – Slay a certain number of monsters. Effect – Increases the damage dealt to monster opponents. Description – A title awarded to those who have defeated a great many monsters.

Yep. This is straight-up just the next rank of Monster Slayer. Probably, if you keep killing a lot of monsters after getting Monster Slayer, you get Monster Slaughterer. Based on the effect and the description, that seems to be the case.

Lord of Pride: *Acquired Skills – [Abyssal Magic (LV 10)] and [Hell]. Acquisition criteria – Acquire the skill [Pride]. Effect – Increases the holder’s mana, magic, and resistance statistics. Increases the rate of proficiency gain towards mental skills. Grants the holder a Ruler’s Privileges. Description: A title awarded to those who rule over Pride.*

...Wait. For a bunch of different reasons, wait. What the heck is that effect? Are *you* the one responsible for that massive stat jump?! And, on top of that, you’ve been boosting my skill proficiency gain too?! *On top of* the bonus that the Pride skill itself was giving me?! No *wonder* Prediction was rocketing up like that!

But, what was that about “Ruler’s Privileges”?

Ruler’s Privileges: *The authority bestowed upon a Ruler to control a part of the world.*

Huh? What the heck is that? Is that something I can use?

“Activation request of Ruler’s Privileges by the Lord of Pride has been received. There is no authority that the Lord of Pride may invoke in the present situation.”

Of coooourse not!! *Seriously*, what the heck is this?! Pride is still such a freaking mystery.

Well, I guess I learned a lot of things about titles. The good Lady Appraisal is really is pretty reliable!

Chapter 80: Spider vs. Fire Drake (1)

Now that I'm satisfied with my Appraisal results, the catfish has cooled down enough that I can eat it. The big bottleneck here in the middle layer is that all the monsters are super hot like this, and I need to wait a while for them to cool down before I can eat them, y'knoow. Even if you let it sit for a little while, the insides are still piping hot even though the surface cools down a bit, so if I'm not careful I'll take some damage. I don't like having to put this much effort into eating...

Whoa, this catfish is delicious. Seriously?! This is the first time in my entire life as a spider that I'm actually getting to eat something delicious! Oh crud... I let the other one of these things escape. Wait, no, if I start chasing now, I can probably catch up, right? Its speed isn't particularly high, so I can probably still make it if I tried, right? Aaaargh, but it escaped into the magma, didn't it, so I really can't do anything about it. Damn it, I messed that up... Well, for now, let's savor this catfish.

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Enhanced Taste (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6."

Deeeelicioooous... My entire life was worth it... Seriously tastyyyy... Of course, it doesn't compare with a lot of the things I ate in my previous life, but I've eaten nothing but unappetizing garbage since being reborn. Finally, *finally*, have I met a creature that is truly delicious.

It's not like I was a picky eater in my previous life or anything. It's just that I didn't know how good I had it until I was reborn as a spider. I'm so sick of eating disgusting monster meat! I want to eat delicious things!

Right! Let's hunt some catfish. No need to worry about things like how the catfish are a little on the strong side. I will put my life on the line to satisfy this craving! This is simply that valuable to me. Now then, wait for me, catfish! I will feast on you until you're all extinct!

Caaaatfiiish! Oh, caa~aatfiiish! Where aaaare you, caaaaatfiiish?

I've been wandering around the labyrinth, looking for catfish. There aren't any. They kept popping up one after another when I didn't want to see them, but now that I do, they can't be found anywhere! Get out here, quickly! Get out here, and then get in my belly.

And, at a time like this, a totally different jerk shows up.

Elro Generash – LV 8

Statistics:

HP: 170/170 (green)

MP: 161/161 (blue)

SP: 158/158 (yellow), 156/167 (red)

Avg. Offense: 87

Avg. Defense: 84

Avg. Magic Power: 84

Avg. Resistance: 81

Avg. Speed: 91

Skills:

[Fire Drake (LV 1)] • [Aiming (LV 4)] • [Swimming (LV 4)] • [Heat Nullification]

Three seahorses have appeared. When I look at their stats, one seahorse's results has a brand new addition. Ahh, that's it!! The Lady Appraisal leveled up, so now she's showing me my target's skills! Whoa! M'lady, you are truly starting to look a little bit OP!

But, uh, Mister Seahorse, don't you have a few too few skills? Like, you have four. They look so lonely! No wonder you don't really seem as strong as your stats would show. And,

on top of that, all of your skills are low level except for Heat Nullification, which is obviously the max-level version of Fire Resistance.

Well, let's start by appraising these new skills.

Fire Drake: *A unique skill bestowed on the Fire Drakes. Grants special abilities and effects based on the level of the skill. Available skills: Breathe Fireball (LV 1)*

Swimming: *Assists the user in swimming.*

Hmm. Like I thought, Fire Drake is a special skill that Fire Drakes get just for existing, like I started with Spider Silk. At level one, it doesn't seem like they can do anything besides just shooting fireballs. Hey, wait, this thing is level eight, but its Fire Drake skill level is only level one, hm. I wonder if it's just really hard to raise the level, or if this thing has just been slacking on its skill development?

Swimming seems to just be a skill that makes you good at swimming. Yep. After looking at that skill list, it's even more obvious: there's no way I can lose against these things.

Well then! Let's quickly get rid... well, okay, getting rid of them is not going to be quick. They are, you know, still in the magma. All I can do from here is chuck small rocks at them. Oh, wait, though, couldn't I synthesize some deadly venom and then coat the rocks in it?

Let's try this out. First step: dodge the incoming while looking for stones to throw. Hm! Accelerated Thought is really pulling its weight. Dodging incoming attacks from three angles seems like the kind of thing I should be putting my full attention into, but I'm thinking so fast that I have plenty of time to plan out my counterattacks.

I face the stone and synthesize some poison. Okay, okay! The poison's sticking to the stone, so... HEAVE!

My rock sails through the air and clocks one of the seahorses square on. How much damage did it do...? Ughhh. Barely any. I guess this is better than doing nothing, but not really by very much. I guess the amount of poison that I can actually stick on a stone isn't going to be able to stick to an opponent, huh...

My Deadly Spider Venom has two kinds of damage: contact damage and absorption damage. Contact damage is dealt when the venom touches the target's skin, while absorption damage is what happens when the target ingests the poison. My venom's absorption damage is vastly more powerful than its contact damage. The contact damage may be comparatively weak, but it's sticky, and if it stays on the target for long enough, its damage suddenly skyrockets. After all, you see, the poison will eventually just get absorbed through the skin; in other words, the contact poison becomes an absorbed poison. Well, if the target washes it off before then, it's a totally different story.

Thus, if I'm facing a monster that can't actually wash its body off, I don't really need to aim for its mouth. I can just stick it basically anywhere on its body. If I'm in a hurry, then my targets are of course the mouth and the eyes, but if I want to be as safe as possible I should aim where I've got the greatest chance of doing some real damage. It, of course, depends on the situation.

And, just like that, the seahorses are starting to just casually wander over here one by one as their mana runs out. These guys have tiny little mouths, so I think I'm going to splash my poison all over~!

Side Story 12: The Academy

This country has places called “academies”. In my previous world, it was only natural for every child to attend school, but in this world, the number of kids who do is actually rather small. Generally, the people who do are the nobility, the aristocracy, and any of the commoners who are particularly affluent or have extraordinary amounts of talent.

Since I’m royalty, attending the academy is no problem for me. Sue is in the same position, and Katia’s cleared because she’s the daughter of a duke. It was decided that the three of us would all enroll in the academy at the same time.

Like schools in my original world, academies instruct their students in general studies. At the same time, we also receive instruction specifically about combat. The continent of Daztordia which we live in is the domain of humanity, but the other continents are still plagued with battles against monsters and demons. There are also monsters here in Daztordia, and there aren’t enough people here to fight back against them. So, the academy gives us plenty of lessons about how to fight.

Sue, Katia and I have gathered in the school’s assembly hall for the matriculation ceremony. Many other new students are seated around us, waiting for the ceremony to start. This academy is one of the largest in the area, and many students from foreign countries are sent all the way here to attend. Here and there, I can see demihumans in the crowd. When I look around the crowd, some of the students quickly avert their eyes while others stare at me. Sometimes, I sense people looking at me and can hear rumors whispered through the crowd.

“Hey, look over there. It’s the prince of this country.”

“They say he’s supposed to be a genius, but he doesn’t look that strong at a glance.”

“I wonder if I can get acquainted with him somehow?”

A lot of things are being said about me, but thanks to Enhanced Hearing, I can hear everything. It’s really making me uncomfortable.

“Good moooorning~!”

A carefree voice rings out, completely shattering the gloomy atmosphere. I turn around and, as expected, see Oka; or, rather, Filimes of the Elves.

“Good morning,” I reply. “It’s very weird to see our teacher become a student.”

“I’m getting to experience the thrill of youth a second time! I’m suuuuper excited!”

Miss Okazaki sits down in the seat next to me. Sue, seated on my other side, gives her a stony glare. Well, perhaps I shouldn’t call it a glare, she might be just staring at her normally. Now that I think about it, this is the first time she’s seen Miss Okazaki, isn’t it?

In the next instant, chills run down my spine.

“Shun’s little sister,” says Miss Okazaki with a brilliant smile, “if you look at me with that kind of bloodlust again, I’m gonna kill yooou~!”

As always, her tone is light and carefree. Her smile, however, does not reach her eyes. Even Sue feels the weight of her pressure.

Katia and I are shocked at that expression. Oka’s got such a cute nickname because she’s always so charming. She was always very friendly, and never got angry with anyone. She was never the kind of person who’d release such a chilling aura of bloodlust, even when someone made a serious mistake.

“Haha, did I sca~aare you? If I want to survive in this world, I got to be able to do at least that much~! Elves mature fa~ar more slowly than humans do, so people tend to look down on us when we’re liiittle, but if you want to pick a fight with this little teacher, you’d better be ready to die, oka~aay?”

Miss Okazaki must have faced down some unimaginable troubles for her to be able to use words like “ready to die” so seriously. Sneakily, I use my recently-leveled Appraisal skill on her.

Appraisal has been blocked.

“Shun,” she says, smacking me on the head, “it’s not very polite to look at a lady’s profile without her permission! I didn’t raise my students to be peeping tooms!”

I don’t know how she did it, but it looks like Miss Okazaki can detect, block, and counter Appraisal attempts. On top of that, it’s a method that I couldn’t react to at all. Just based on that, I know that I won’t be able to beat her.

“I’m sorry. I was just curious.”

“Yep. When you do something bad, it’s best to apologize! But the next time you Appraise me without my permission, it’ll be a lot more unpleasant for you, okay?”

“Yes, ma’am. I will remember that.”

Seriously. Against this kind of opponent, I shouldn’t do anything impudent.

Suddenly, a doubt pops into my mind. “But, Miss Okazaki, if you’re already that strong, there’s no need for you to attend the academy, is there?”

Truthfully, although Sue, Katia, and I have been constantly training, we don’t have any actual combat experience. So, we’re here at the Academy to work on perfecting our fundamentals. Miss Okazaki, however, seems to have already had loads of real combat experience piled up on top of her, given the way she talks and how powerful she seems to be. So, why does she need to study here at the academy?

“There is! There’s loads of things for me to study here! But that’s only half of it. In the short term, I’m going to be using this country as my base of operations!”

“But you don’t need to go to the academy for that...”

“I’m not talking about searching for the other students.”

“...Uh, then, ...what?”

“That’s still a secret, but I’m leaving the rest of the search to the elves!”

Her shocking remark causes my back to stiffen. The last time we met, she said that she still hadn't managed to find six of our classmates. What could possibly cause her to abandon that quest?

"I know it might sound a li~ttle bit heartless to say, but I've done all I can in my search! The only places left to search are the demon lands and the untamed wilderness, and, if I'm going to be perfectly honest, I'm not even sure if they survi~ived."

"What?!" I shout.

"Miss Okazaki, are you serious?" asks Katia, stunned.

"I'm serious, very serious, *dead* serio~ous. Disaster relief is all about immediate a~action. I've done everything I possibly could, e~ever since I was reborn. Bu~ut, I thought that it would be a big relief if I could find half of you guys when I started, you kno~ow? I managed to drastically exceed that number, so I think my results are gre~eat."

"But..."

Suddenly, she grabs me by the shoulders. "Okay, are *you* going to try to find them?" she demands, speaking perfectly normally. "How are you going to do that? Are you just going to go out and start walking around? You think you're just going to *find* them like that?"

My hardened heart starts to crumble against her onslaught. Miss Okazaki sees this in my eyes and breathes a deep sigh.

"I know I ju~ust said this, but I really did everything I possibly could. I think what I need to do from now on is try to make sure that the students I *was* able to find can have the ve~ery best life they can in this world. So~o, I'm coming here to study a lot of different things, while also doing some other things on the si~ide, okay?"

"I... understand."

I still don't agree with her from the bottom of my heart, but Miss Okazaki really has done her best. Besides, I didn't do anything at all myself to help with her search, so I don't think I'm qualified to give my opinion. Most likely, she's the one with the deepest regrets right now.

"I'm sorry. I kind of just butted in like that."

“Shun, I never said you were wro~ong. It’s ju~ust, even if you’re not wrong about something, that doesn’t a~always mean you’re right.”

After that, the matriculation ceremony started. To be honest, I didn’t pay any attention to any of it at all. So, I never noticed the expression on Sue’s face even though she was sitting right next to me, nor the one on Katia’s, even though she was in the seat next to Sue.

Chapter 81: Spider vs. Fire Drake (2)

Caaaaatfiiiiiiish~!! How I have been dreaming of this day, catfish!! I've finally found you catfish!! Now, give me your meat! Give it to me now! Your only other option is for me to kill you and take it by force!

I've finally found the catfish I've been searching so hard for! This one's currently swimming in the magma. My first task is to figure out how to lure it out.

By the way, I appraised its skills a little earlier. There's a pretty huge difference in stats between this guy and the dudes from before. The catfish's skills are Fire Drake at level two, Dragon Scales at level one, Aiming at seven, Swimming at six, Overeating at two, and Heat Nullification. The Fire Drake skill at level two is called "Heatclad", which does exactly what the name implies: wraps the user's body in extreme heat. At first, it looked to me like it was a purely defensive skill, but Lady Appraisal informed me that it also increases the user's speed while it's active. However, since this involves heating the user's body up to an extreme degree, it looks like it would actually damage the user if they didn't have a lot of Fire Resistance. These catfish have Heat Nullification, though, so it doesn't matter.

Dragon Scales is a skill that grows special scales all over the user's body. As for how special they are, they not only of course have a high defensive ability but also provide some protection against magic. It doesn't just block it, though, it seems like it actively interferes with the spell's pattern to weaken it. Well, regardless, I can't actually use magic, so I really only have to think of it as really tough scales.

The ones after that are ones that you should already know. Hmm, I just thought of this, though... is this catfish an evolved form of a seahorse? It's got the same Fire Drake skill, and it does have upgrades of all of the skills that the seahorses had. Compared to a seahorse, a catfish not only has much higher skill levels, but also Dragon Scales and Overeating. Whether I'm looking at the species or the skills, this does seem pretty plausible.

If that's the case, though, then its appearance really must change a ton from evolving, huh... Turning from a seahorse into a catfish, doesn't that seem like a downgrade, biologically speaking? I really don't know the details, though, so I can't say anything for certain, though. The appearance changes so much... ah! If you stretch a seahorse's mouth waaay out and you thicken its body up a ton, that starts to look like a catfish, right? Hmmmmm. Maaaybe.

Well, it really doesn't matter. The only thing that matters to me about a catfish is its meat. So, let's try a first strike: Poison Stone!

My poison-covered rock sails out and hits the catfish on its back. Yep. It didn't take very much damage from that at all. I guess I'm going to do the same thing I did before: use Poison Synthesis to dump a bunch of poison on it when it charges out at me.

As I was thinking that, the freaking catfish used its fireball breath on me from the magma! Seriouslyyy? It's bigger and faster than the seahorse's. Well, even still, it's not like it'll hit me. I dodge to the side with a little hop, and it sails right past me.

Accelerated Thought only allows me to extend time by a little bit, but even so it still feels like the world is moving just a bit more slowly. Thanks to how ridiculously high my speed is, it feels like I can keep moving normally, even when time is slowed down like this. Well, when I get a few more levels in Accelerated Thought, things are going to get slower and slower, so I don't know what things are going to be like then. I think that I'm stretching 1 second into 1.1 seconds, maybe? This isn't an accurate assessment at all since it's just based on my sensations, but I think I'm being pretty accurate here.

The catfish fires off a second shot. This thing is doing exactly the same thing as the seahorses. It really is starting to look like they're related, after all... I guess I just got lucky that the last catfish crawled onto solid ground at the start of the fight. I use the same strategy here as with the seahorses, right? Ah, although, this guy has extra abilities like Heatclad, so I'm probably going to have to change up my strategy a bit. Maybe the last catfish attacked me on land because I suddenly showed up in front of it, looking like an enemy.

I keep dodging the catfish's fireballs. Its mana is going to run dry soon, but is it really going to come out? When the seahorses run out mana, they just calmly crawl out onto the dry ground, but what's the catfish going to do? It's going to be a real problem for me if it doesn't come up onto land, but based on the last fight I think it might flee if it senses that it's in danger.

I can't let that happen, you know? I'm going to chase you down to the ends of the earth, you know?

I put my concerns aside for now, since the catfish has stopped launching fireballs. Hm? It still has a little bit of mana left, though...? Oh! Now it's ticking down. Did it just turn on Heatclad? Maaaan, it's so amazing that I can tell what's happening here. I know every single detail of my opponent. Appraisal really is OP.

The catfish crawls out of the magma, turns toward me, and charges, its wide mouth gaping. Eh heh heh. I've been waiting for this!!

When it's come close enough, I dodge to the side, activating Poison Synthesis as I do so. The catfish's mouth snaps shut on a glob of deadly poison, and it gulps it down. I keep a eye on it, and... oh! It fell over. Aww, it's twitching. My Deadly Spider Poison really is amazingly potent. The regular Strong Poison wouldn't have anywhere near this kind of effect, but Poison Synthesis works amazingly well once I pair it up with my own natural poisons. Seriously, I am super compatible with this skill.

Now then, let's pour a little more poison on this suffering catfish. With a huge, final convulsion, its breathing comes to a ragged halt. Now all I have to do is wait for all of the heat from both the magma and Heatclad to dissipate.

Din-ner~, din-ner~! I've been eating all of the other monsters I've defeated so far out of grim obligation, but this time is different! I'm going to be eating something delicious. Ahh, what a wonderful thing!

Maaaan, this isn't going to cool quickly. I'm going to sit here and look forward to finally eating this thing.

Chapter 82: Spider vs. Fire Drake (3)

I gladly ate the delicious catfish. It was exquisite. In the middle of my dinner, Enhanced Taste leveled up to seven. I kind of wanted to interject some kind of sarcastic quip about being way too focused on my eating, but I really couldn't help it! I've been eating nothing but disgusting things until now! Wouldn't you want to eat something tasty after all that, too?!

Incidentally, Overeating is now also at level eight. The size of my stock has been more than sufficient for a while now, but since leveling the skill just seems to increase the amount I can store, there's no real downside to it. It's creeping up towards level ten, though, and I want to see what new skill will be derived from it, or maybe what it might even evolve into instead. I've got really high hopes, since the base skill is already so useful. Plus, there's something in specific that I'm kind of curious about.

The thing that's got me thinking is this Pride skill. Pride, of course, is one of the seven deadly sins. Gluttony is another. Overeating and Gluttony both have very similar meanings. Maybe, just maybe, could Overeating wind up evolving into Gluttony? I can't help but wonder about that. Pride is already an excessively amazing skill, so if Overeating really does evolve into Gluttony, and if Gluttony really is part of the same skill tree as Pride, then I'll have another skill that rivals Pride in power.

I'm already worried about what Pride does, though. If I get Gluttony, too, that's another source of anxiety to weigh over me.

Well, it's still level eight, though. It's too early to start worrying. Plus, this is a skill that levels up of its own accord anyway, so even if I was worried about it there's ultimately nothing I can really do about it.

Well then, shall we? It's time to begin hunting for my next catfish.

Caaaaatfiiiiish!!

I wander the middle strata, searching for catfish. However, I can't find a single one. Mmmrgh. If they're all lurking down in the magma to start with, of coocourse I won't be able to find them... The first time I saw one of those things, it just kinda popped up out of the magma unexpectedly, huh... If they usually spend all their time swimming around under the magma, then finding them will be really difficult.

Now that I think about it, I'm actually pretty good at noticing enemies around me, even without using any skills. I never really noticed it before, but now that I think back, I can't help but wonder if I have really good intuition. I don't think anyone's ever managed to sneak up on me in either the upper or the lower strata. Right before I would have been attacked, I always feel a twinge of danger shoot through my head. This is just speculation, but I this might be something that spiders have automatically. I think I might be reading the air currents around me and unconsciously reacting to them.

If I think of it like that, then it makes a looot of sense as to why I didn't notice that one catfish until it popped out of the magma right next to me. If I'm reading the air currents, then it's only natural that I wouldn't be able to feel things that are deep in the magma. If a sneak attack were to come from underwater or underground, I don't think I'd be able to detect it at all.

This means that being close to the magma is very dangerous. If something were to suddenly leap up out of the magma and drag me back down with it, my fate would be sealed. Well, even if that's not the case, getting too close to the magma is still pretty dangerous on its own, so I should keep some distance from it regardless. I'm just going to need to be extra vigilant for monsters suddenly popping out of the magma.

Ah, just like this.

A monster leaps out of the magma ahead of me. If I had to describe it in one word, I'd say it's... an eel? Yeah. It's a monstrous eel that's grown arms, legs, and scales.

Elro Generaive – LV 2

Statistics:

HP: 1001/1001 (green)

MP: 511/511 (blue)

SP: 899/899 (yellow), 971/971 (red) +57

Avg. Offense: 893

Avg. Defense: 821

Avg. Magic Power: 454

Avg. Resistance: 433

Avg. Speed: 582

Skills:

[Fire Drake (LV 4)] • [Dragon Scales (LV 5)] • [Flame Enhancement (LV 1)] • [Aiming (LV 10)] • [Evasion (LV 1)] • [Probability Compensation (LV 1)] • [High-Speed Swimming (LV 2)] • [Overeating (LV 5)] • [Heat Nullification] • [Vitality (LV 3)] • [Alacrity (LV 1)] • [Endurance (LV 3)] • [Strength (LV 1)] • [Toughness (LV 1)]

Not good. This eel looks *really* strong.

Elro Generative: A mid-ranking species of monster, related to the drakes, that inhabits the middle strata of the Great Elro Labyrinth. It is omnivorous, but prefers to devour other monsters.

Wow, this much strength is mid-ranked? Also, now that I see its skills, are these eels the next evolutionary form of the catfish?

Ah, I don't have the spare time to get curious about that right now. The eel is only about fifteen meters in front of me. It's already spotted me and has locked on target. My speed is still greater than its is, but I am significantly outclassed in every other stat. The most terrifying thing, though, is my entire red stamina bar, plus my Overeating stock, doesn't even come close to its stamina. If I were to try running away, it's very likely that it would just catch up to me immediately once I ran out of stamina. I'd really hope it would give up before that happened, though... My yellow stamina gauge is really short, too, so I can't

maintain my top speed for very long at all. The absolute worst case scenario is running my yellow meter dry and *then* getting caught.

Can I actually escape? ...Right as I think that, the eel's figure blurs and splits into two. This is Foresight's effect in action. The blurry reflection of the eel moves as if it's spitting something out. Immediately after that, the eel itself does the exact same thing, launching a fireball right at me. I guess it really does use the same tactics as the seahorses and the catfish, but this guy's fireballs are way bigger and way faster!

I scramble to dodge. The fireball flies at me so quickly that it feels like Accelerated Thought isn't having any effect at all. It slams into the ground where I just was and detonates. Even with Foresight and Accelerated Thought, I was just barely able to dodge. I thought I had a little bit more clearance than that, what gives?

Probability Compensation: *Increases the success rate of skills that are governed by probability.*

Is it because of that skill? It could be increasing the accuracy of those fireballs. If that's the case, then it'll be difficult to keep dodging, even with my Evasion skill. This is really, really bad.

Chapter 83: Spider vs. Fire Drake (4)

The eel spits out more fireballs, and I dodge them. As soon as I dodge the first, the second is already flying. I can't even think about running away anymore.

My health ticks down a little as I'm caught at the edge of the explosions. I could dodge them completely if I was moving at maximum speed, but that would drain my yellow meter far too quickly. If I keep going all-out, my yellow meter would hit rock bottom in an instant, leaving me completely out of breath. That, of course, would be the end.

Thanks to Foresight and Accelerated Thought, I can predict where the fireballs are going to land and dodge out of the way early. However, the eel can read my movements as well and adjust its aim before firing. Can either of us outwit the other? My mind strains under the weight as I try to see through its strategies. If one of the eel's fireballs miss me, it's no big deal for the eel. If, however, I fail to dodge just one, I'm dead. There's a huge difference here.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Accelerated Thought (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Foresight (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

I am really happy about the timing on these level-ups. The fireballs seem to be moving a little bit more slowly through the air. I need to be careful, though, since this means that my own motions will be a little bit slower, too.

I dodge the fireball. As I do that, I notice through Foresight that the eel's movements are about to change. It's not that different from its fireball breathing motions, but this one is much bigger.

I release the limiters and jump to my maximum speed, dashing away so quickly that it's like I leave the scenery behind. A violent flame obliterates everything behind me.

Flame Breath: Exhales a wide torrent of roaring flame.

This is the level four technique of the Fire Drake skill. I'm sure I didn't get hit directly, but even the waste heat is searing my back. Bit by bit, my health is decreasing. The way this situation has rapidly been deteriorating, I'm now in a spot where just a single hit will do me in. And, of course, even if I acknowledge that, I still don't have a strategy to turn this around. I don't have any choice but to keep dodging around like this while looking for a chance to strike back. Watching my life get steadily whittled away, though, is unnerving to the extreme.

Another fireball flies at me. Thanks to the eel's level ten Aiming skill and its Probability Compensation skill, its aim is unbelievably accurate. If I didn't have my Evasion, Accelerated Thought, and Foresight combo, I doubt that I'd be able to dodge any of this at all.

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Evasion (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6."

Alright! This isn't going to let me turn things around entirely, but I'll take every little advantage I can get.

Dodging another fireball, I glance up at the eel's remaining mana pool. It's been using a lot of it, but its bar is still more than half full. That Flame Breath was enormous, and it looks like its mana consumption was huge as well. It's good that the eel can't fire that off randomly, but if I can, I'd like to keep things going the way they are right now. Foresight doesn't always activate when I need it, and I'm not at all confident in my ability to dodge if I'm not getting every scrap of information about the eel's movements that I possibly can.

Right as I thought that, Prediction shows the eel going through the motions of Flame Breath again. Once again, I unleash my top speed and blitz past it. The eel, though, doesn't fire in a straight line. It shakes its head from side to side, raining fire to mow down everything in a line! Flame Breath already hits in a wide area, so this is just too freaking huge.

Guh! It grazed me. It only grazed me, and I still lost ten health. One of my hind legs and a small part of my back got caught in the flame. My leg hurts a little bit, but it still moves, so I don't think it'll be a problem. Although... it might be a little bit slower than it was before. Not good.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fire Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

Finally, Fire Resistance leveled up, after staying stubbornly at level one forever. Amazing timing. If Fire Resistance's level goes up, the amount of environmental damage I'm taking will go down, and Automatic HP Recovery will probably be able to catch up. The recovery rate is probably going to be extremely slow, but I would much rather have a little bit of recovery than nothing at all.

I glance at the eel's mana. Perfect. It's under the halfway point now. It looks like the fireball's mana cost is about 10, and Flame Breath's is about 50. It may be down to half mana, but by my estimates the eel could blast off another four Flame Breaths if it really wanted to. I can't take that.

I start running, trying to put some distance between me and the eel. The eel gives chase, shooting fireballs after me as it swims. Just as planned so far. Like I suspected, it looks like it can't use its Flame Breath while it's moving. Now, if I keep running away like this, and it keeps launching fireballs at me, then it will eventually have to run out of mana at some point. When that happens, then I've got a chance. Probably.

For now, my highest priority is evasion. I'm falling back as far as I can, but my most important job is moving so that I don't get hit. I concentrate on planning out an escape route, picking out paths that won't get me cornered by a pool of magma. A single misstep here could be fatal! I feel like I'm walking on a tightrope.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Automatic HP Recovery (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”

All right, all right!! I don't know if it's because being in combat is forcing me to concentrate harder, but my skills have been leveling up very quickly. All the skills I've been trying to level up for a while, like Fire Resistance, are going up one by one now.

I am delighted for a split second. However, that split second was fatal.

The eel rears its head back. It's about to breathe fire! This was completely unexpected. Foresight didn't see this coming. I can't dodge this.

Fire blasts forth from the eel's mouth. I immediately kick off from the ground with all of my strength, launching myself as high as I can into the air. The flame sears through my legs as I fly upwards. I push the pain aside and stretch out a strand of silk, sticking it to the ceiling. I frantically pull myself up to it, and land on the ceiling.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [3-D Maneuvering (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5.”

From the ceiling, I look down at the eel. From the magma, the eel looks back up at me. I somehow managed to dodge the worst of that attack, but, well, what am I going to do from here...?

Chapter 84: Spider vs. Fire Drake (5)

It's a good thing that I managed to escape to the ceiling, but I'm not particularly thrilled with the current state of affairs. At the very least, while I'm on the ceiling, I'm way slower than I would be if I were on the ground instead. When I was on the ground, even when I was trying my very, *very* best, I was barely avoiding the eel's attacks. On the ceiling, I don't think I have any chance at all. If I don't get back down soon, I think I'm going to be sniped to death.

On the other hand, I wouldn't really say that the eel has very much room for error, either. It's burned through a lot of its mana already. If it were to spend all of it, then it could probably get either three Flame Breaths or sixteen fireballs off. Compared to where it was at at the start of this whole encounter, it has far fewer options. However, I definitely think that it still has the strength to knock me off of the ceiling.

The real question is whether I'm going to be the one to get myself down, or if the eel's going to do it for me.

I immediately start to move, aiming at the nearest wall. The eel, however, looks like it anticipated this, and has launched a fireball right in my path. Here on the ceiling, dodging is extremely difficult. I don't have time to be concerned about my yellow stamina gauge right now! I use the maximum speed I possibly can, trying to get out of the way of the rapidly approaching fireball.

I don't have much choice but to push through this, leaning on SP Consumption Reduction and Automatic SP Recovery. Before my yellow meter empties out entirely, I have to make it to that wall.

I somehow manage to dodge the fireball. However, thanks to that, I'm not significantly closer to the wall than I was before. And, of course, since I'm moving so quickly, my yellow meter is going down even further. Not good. If I run out of yellow stamina, continuing to cling to the ceiling is going to start being very difficult. Even still, it's not like I can just stop dodging these fireballs.

And even though I'm keeping all of that in mind, there's no way I can actually advance as I planned, not with this perfect fireball sniping from below. And then, at last, my yellow gauge finally runs out. In an instant, fatigue slams through my entire body. And, mercilessly, another fireball is approaching.

Guh!

There's no way I can defend against this one, so I of course throw myself from the ceiling and into empty air. The fireball detonates right next to me, and the blast gently brushes past my body, sending me into a tailspin. To try to regain any sort of control over my own body, I fling a strand of silk straight out. It sticks to a wall, and I immediately yank myself in. Another fireball sails right through the space where I just was.

I swing down through the air like a pendulum, letting go just barely in time to land on solid ground instead of falling into scorching hot magma. Even here, yet another relentless fireball is flying at me again. I turn my landing velocity into a tumble, rolling out of the way just in time.

This really hurts. My yellow stamina is completely gone, but I still have to keep moving. Crushing exhaustion and agony weigh down my entire body, suffocating me, so bitter I can taste it. I muscle myself past it, though, with the help of Ignore Pain and Pain Tolerance.

Because, of course, the eel is about to spit out another Flame Breath.

I whip my trembling body into motion and run at full speed. The light of the roaring flame stains everything around me a brilliant red. A wave of searing heat rushes toward me from behind, and I keep running, trying to shake it off. Thus, I managed to avoid another Flame Breath.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Evasion (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

I have a moment to catch my breath after I dodge the Flame Breath. My yellow stamina meter starts to fill back up.

There aren't any more fireballs coming this way. Finally, the eel has run out of mana. Having lost its long-distance attacks, it glides onto land, finally showing its true appearance.

The only part of it that really looks like an eel is its head. The rest of it looks very much like a Chinese dragon with a very long body. Even though it's exhausted all of its mana, it still has its eyes set firmly on me. For whatever reason, this thing has completely and totally decided that I am its enemy. Maybe at the beginning of all this the eel thought that I was just a nuisance ruining the view, but partway through the fight it felt like it started getting serious about throwing those fireballs. By the time it broke out its Flame Breath, it was *really* serious. Somehow, it's looking like the eel is really unhappy that I managed to dodge all of its attacks.

Even if I try to escape now, I don't think it'll let me get away. After all, even though its mana may be depleted, it still has plenty of stamina. I, on the other hand, have basically zero left. My red meter has depleted itself to the point where I can't ignore it anymore, as payment for the fact that I kept running despite being completely out of yellow stamina. I still have plenty of buffer left from Overeating, so I'm not in any danger of just collapsing immediately, but if I were to get into a raw endurance race with the eel, I would definitely lose.

I can't escape. There's only one real option available: fight it, and win.

If you just compare our raw numerical statistics, there's no way I can compete. However, my stats don't tell the whole story. Even though I understand that fighting isn't a good thing, these skills are probably the most important things you can have in this world.

Honestly, if you just look at my stats, it looks like it's straight-up miraculous how I've been able to survive for so long. This miracle was brought about, of course, by all of my skills. If I use every single one of my skills to their maximum potential, I can overcome my huge statistical disadvantage, and manage to even just barely crawl around in the same arena as

this eel. There may be a difference in our statistics, but those numbers aren't absolute. The difference is just small enough that I can make up the rest of it with the judicious application of my skills.

On top of that, I've already seen through every single one of the eel's skills. Now that its mana is gone, it's only left with three that I really care about: the dream combo of Aiming, Evasion, and Probability Compensation. In addition, I need to keep the raw defensive power of its Dragon Scales in mind. This is the third-level effect of the Fire Drake skill. And, last but not least, I need to be cautious of the raw power of its enormous body.

Even just looking at it, I can tell it's a formidable enemy. I, however, still have my trump card, my most potent weapon: my deadly venom. Against my poison, defensive statistics are worthless. It will land on your tough scales, corrode its way through them, and then assault your body directly, leaving you dead and twitching. In the end, all I can rely on are my skills. The only way I can surpass this thing is if I use my skills. But, however, that means that I actually *can* surpass this.

Neither of us can defend against the other's attacks. If a even single attack manages to hit, one of us is almost certainly going to die. So, the deciding factor in all of this is going to be...

Just like that, round two of my battle against the eel has begun, this time on solid ground.

Chapter 85. Spider vs. Fire Drake, the Conclusion

The eel undulates its long body back and forth. In both its offense and its defense so far, it's been very cautious of me. This eel definitely seems more intelligent than some of the other monsters I've fought, although it might not be as smart as the monkeys. That alone makes things that much harder for me.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Accelerated Thought (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.” “Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Foresight (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

As soon as the so-called “Voice of Heaven” starts to speak, the eel leaps into action. It whips its entire body around, and its tail lashes out at me. I dodge, of course, but the eel isn't finished attacking. It swings its tail back around, sweeping horizontally along the ground at me like a scythe. I jump backwards, dodging once again. It pulls its tail back, flipping itself around, and charges toward me headfirst.

This is exactly the moment I was waiting for.

In the slightly leisurely world of Accelerated Thought, I gaze at eel's gaping mouth as it draws close. Right when I judge that I'd only be barely able to dodge, I activate Poison Synthesis. Then, I jump away.

It's the exact same strategy I used against the catfish, but its effect is still massive. Just as I planned, the glob of deadly poison lands right in the eel's mouth.

The eel thrashes around violently, in extreme pain as its health quickly evaporates. I scurry back, out of harm's way.

At the end of the day, if both opponents have enough offensive power to eliminate each other in a single blow, then whoever lands that first blow wins. The question then becomes one of making your attack actually hit, so it is ultimately the opponent with the best tactics that will win the fight. On top of that, my evasive abilities are greater than its accuracy.

That eel may have Aiming at level ten and a Probability Compensation skill, but it's no match for my Evasion, Accelerated Thought, and Foresight combo. So, now that I've dragged it up onto solid ground with me, my chances for success are suddenly much, much higher.

It's not over yet, though. I was talking about one hit knockouts, but this eel isn't going to die from just one glob of poison. I didn't kill the catfish with just one shot, so there's no way that this higher-ranked eel will die from just that, either. Also, the eel still has one more ability to rely on.

Before my eyes, the eel's health meter starts to rapidly refill.

Life Conversion: *Converts the user's stamina points into health points.*

This is the level three ability of the Fire Drake skill. It consumes stamina to restore the same amount of health. It may not have enough stamina available to heal itself entirely, but it can give itself enough health to endure the worst of my poison. Even worse, as I'm looking at its Appraisal result, I see two new skills appear: Poison Resistance and Automatic HP Recovery, both at level one. The poison, though, still burns through its system. Even if the damage is already past its peak, it's still shaving off health, bit by bit.

Well, it's not like I'm just quietly sitting there and watching as the eel as it peacefully revives itself.

I run around the eel wrapping it in the thickest, strongest silk I can produce. I'm pretty sure it's going to burn through this in an instant, but that doesn't matter. If I can hold it still, one instant is all I need.

Exactly as I was hoping, I manage to hold it still for just one moment. In that moment, I aim at the eel and activate Poison Synthesis as quickly as I possibly can. Countless blobs of poison rain down on the eel's face, splashing all over it.

The eel flails wildly, tearing through my threads. My poison has made it in through its mouth and its eyes, and it burns away at its health. It moves too quickly for that brand new

Automatic HP Regeneration to regenerate. It burns too strongly for that brand new Poison Resistance to resist. I have spent my entire life as a spider honing these weapons! A hastily-constructed shield like that has no chance of stopping me!

The eel has long since burned through all of its stamina to heal itself, and it has nothing left with which to resist this attack.

“Experience requirements met. Small Poison Taratekt, you have grown from level 7 to level 8. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Multitasking (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5 and your skill [Accelerated SP Recovery (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3. You have acquired additional skill points.”

“Experience requirements met. Small Poison Taratekt, you have grown from level 8 to level 9. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Alacrity (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9 and your skill [Endurance (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9. You have acquired additional skill points.”

“Experience requirements met. Small Poison Taratekt, you have grown from level 9 to level 10. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Computation (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7, your skill [Enhanced Vision (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9, and your skill [Vitality (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9. You have acquired additional skill points.”

“Level requirement met. Small Poison Taratekt, you are eligible for evolution.”

Victory!! Part three: complete!¹

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. I actually don't know what parts one and two are.

Side Story 13: The Saint and the Sword Emperor

The entrance ceremony went off without a hitch. After that, everyone started wandering off. Most of the students went to their new assigned dormitories, while many others left to explore the campus. This academy is a boarding school. All students must live in the dormitories, and I'm no exception. Unless there's a very good reason, students don't leave the school grounds except for long vacations.

"What shall we do after this?" asks Katia, talking in princess mode. We're already in the middle of getting our dormitories prepared. If possible, though, I'd still like to go explore the campus after this.

"There's some people I want to go me~eet!" says Miss Okazaki. "Do any of you want to come wi~ith me?"

"There's people you'd like to meet?" I ask.

"Corre~ect! I want to go meet the future Sa~aint and the future Sword Empero~or. No reason for you not to come alo~ong!"

The Saint¹ and the Sword Emperor. The Saint is the holy symbol of the Holy Country of Aleius. The position is appointed by the state itself, and is often described as a counterpart to the Hero himself. She is obligated to go with the Hero when he goes out on a mission. Right now, my older brother Julius is likely out somewhere with the current Saint.

The Sword Emperor is the emperor of the largest country on the continent of Daztordia, the Rengzant Empire. Rengzant is a country right on the edge of the demon's lands, so it is constantly plagued by battle. The foremost requirement to become the emperor of that country is strength. Because of that, each Emperor bears the same title that the first Emperor of Rengzant did: Sword Emperor.

Where the Saint is selected from a pool of talented candidates, the Sword Emperor is chosen by bloodline. In other words, I guess, the boy now attending this academy is the current Sword Emperor's son.

“Aah, the crown prince of the Rengzant Empire! I have heard rumors about that man. It would certainly seem that he is attending this academy this year, just as we are. They say that his skill with a sword is unparalleled, rivaling even that of the first Sword Emperor.”

Eh? How does Katia know that? This is the first I’m hearing about any of this!

“Shun, you should learn more of the ways of the world,” says Katia, amazed. She might have seen something in my expression. Grr, I can’t deny it, though.

“Miss Okazaki,” she says, “why are you so intent on meeting them personally? Is it the matter we were discussing earlier?”

“Ye~ep! It’s that thing!”

“Well, then I absolutely mustn’t miss this.”

Somehow, the conversation continues just between the two of them. Sue and I exchange glances, feeling completely left behind.

“Now, Shun, let us be off... hm? Why are you making that face?”

“Um, I didn’t really follow what you were saying...”

“I’d understand Sue saying that, but why are you...”

Katia and Miss Okazaki both give me very disappointed looks. Th... there’s no need to put on faces like that, right?

“Ah! It looks like we don’t need to head out after a~all!”

I look over to where Miss Okazaki is pointing and see a boy and girl coming toward us. The boy has brown hair so dark it’s almost black and eyes of the same color. His demeanor is sharp and fearless. The girl has wavy blond hair and bright blue eyes, and has a mysterious loveliness about her.

“Hey! This tiny elf kid, this Oka?”

“Natsume! Don’t be rude to your teacher! It’s nice to see you again, Miss Okazaki.”

These two are speaking *in Japanese!* I suddenly understand what Katia and Miss Okazaki were just talking about. These two are reincarnated people, just like us.

“Nice to see you to~oo! Natsume, Hasebe, I’m so~o glad to see you two are doing well.”

I recognize who these two are as soon as she says their names. The boy was formerly known as Natsume Kengo, the center of attention amongst the boys in the class. (I didn’t particularly like him very much.) He was strong and had good reflexes, and while he never was actually violent, his strength was kind of intimidating and drew him a lot of attention. Since he also had a powerful, domineering personality, there were a lot of students who supported him, and a lot who opposed him. I was one of the latter. Well, I was technically on the opposing side, but I really just didn’t go near him.

“Ahaha! Oka, you were already tiny to begin with, and you shrunk even more! Friggin’ hilarious!”

“Natsume!!”

The girl who scolds Natsume was formerly known as Hasebe Yuika. Unlike Natsume, Hasebe was a girl who was really neither good nor bad. She was the kind of person who tended to go with the flow, but I can’t think of anything in particular that would make her stand out as a candidate for being the Saint.

“I’m an elf, I can’t help being tiny~y! Also~o, you’re not that much taller than I am right no~ow!”

“That’s okay, ‘cause I’m only going to get bigger from here. Oh hey, that guy over there, that’s the prince here, right? Who’s that inside him?”

Natsume turns his attention to me. He looks at me like a lion looks at its prey, his eyes shining with fierce intensity. It feels like he’s about to pounce. I thought this guy was kind of nasty in his past life, but did he really use to have such dangerous eyes?

“I’m Yamada Shunsuke,” I reply, tersely.

“And I’m Ooshima Kanata. Long time no see.”

Katia steps forward, forcefully attracting attention to herself.

“Eh? Ooshima?” asks Hasebe, taking the bait. “Yep! I’m Ooshima. Surprised? I got reborn as a woman when I got reincarnated.”

Katia’s introduction brought the conversation all to herself, and Natsume’s attention drifted away from me. Thank you, Katia.

Even still, I’m going to need to be very careful of Natsume, whose new name is Hugo Von Regzand.

Translator’s notes for this chapter:

1. *The word here is specifically 聖女, which is explicitly feminine.*

Chapter 86: Victory Dance

“You have a choice in evolutionary forms. Please choose between [Poison Taratekt] and [Zoa Ere].”

Ahh, evolution, huh... Wait, evolution!? That was fast!! I thought it happened quickly back when I fought those monkeys, but this time is super quick too?!

Well, I can save evolving for later. Now is the time for savoring the taste of victory.

I woooooon!!!

Ya~hoo!

I beat it! I beat it! I fought against that ridiculously strong eel, and I beat it!

I’m freaking amazing, right?! I’m super strong, right?!

Heh. Heh heh. I didn’t even really get to use my thread! I fought that thing straight on, head to head, and I kicked its butt!! You don’t get to call me weak a-ny-more! I’m poooowerful!! Woohoooo!!

That eel was a formidable opponent. It was *very much* a formidable opponent. That was a struggle to the death. But the victor? Me. Numero freaking Uno, right here. Eheehehehe.

Ah! Not good. I’m still super excited. Hehehe. Because, you know, that was a freaking *drake*! And not a drake-in-name-only like those catfish and seahorses, but a real, honest-to-god, drake-like drake! And who was it beat that thing in a one-on-one, fair and square, face-to-face cage match?!

ME!!

Aaaah!! I’m getting way too pumped again! Wa... HOOOO!!

We are experiencing technical difficulties. Please stand by.

Inhaaaale, exhaaaale. I got so excited that I ran out of breath. Whoooof. Now then, let's put all that excitement aside, and figure out what I'm going to be doing next, hm?

First off, I leveled up a bunch all at once. As expected of that eel. Its drake classification was not just for show. Its stats were overwhelmingly more powerful than mine, so between that and Pride's experience bonus, I leveled up quite a bit in one shot. My skills also went up quite a bit in the middle of that fight, so all in all this was a really tasty encounter, experience point-wise.

To be perfectly honest, though, that fight was probably determined entirely by luck. In reality, if a single foot was even the slightest bit out of place, I'd be cinders right now, wafting through the breeze. That's how strong that eel was. I mean, if you just take a look at its raw stats, there's no way you could say that I had any shot of winning. It was like that when I fought those monkeys too! I'm winning way too many fights by the skin of my teeth.

The two skills I'm most happy about raising are Automatic HP Recovery and Fire Resistance. Before, my regeneration rate was just barely able to keep up with the constant environmental damage I was taking from the heat. Now that my resistance is higher and my regeneration is faster, I think I might be able to start slowly regenerating my lost health. I can't test it right now, though, since leveling up fully healed me. Well, that still doesn't change the fact that I'm almost assuredly still going to die in a single hit.

So. I hit level ten. And, since I hit level ten, I get the chance to evolve. But, what should I do? Is it really safe for me to evolve in a place like this?

After all, evolving carries with it a suitable amount of peril: while I'm in the middle of evolving, I am completely and utterly unconscious. I'd be completely and utterly defenseless if another monster came and attacked me! Last time, and the time before that, I made sure to guarantee my own safety first. This time, I can't do that, because, y'know, I can't use my silk. If I were to build a nest in the middle of all this scorching magma, it would absolutely just catch fire as I tried to make it. Could I evolve while surrounded in flames, you ask? Absolutely impossible.

It's not just that. Evolving itself takes a ton of energy to happen, which massively depletes my mana and stamina. The worst case there is starving to death afterwards. I've had tons of food stockpiled in advance for all of my other evolutions, so I was able to gorge myself immediately afterward. I have no such stockpile here. Well, I *do* have this eel, but I don't think that it'll actually fill my stamina all the way back up, as enormous as it may be. I wouldn't have to worry about immediately starving to death, but I'd be stuck hunting for prey for a while afterwards.

Ah, although, what would happen to my Overeating stock? I didn't really have anything in my stockpile the last few times I evolved, huh... Some of it got drained away while I was fighting the eel, but even so I still have a ton of it. If I can use the energy from my stockpile for evolving, then maybe it won't actually be completely empty when it's all over... hmmmmn. I really shouldn't act based just on wishful thinking, though, right?

On a purely emotional level, I really want to evolve right now, but if I make myself think about things like safety, it really is looking like I should just hold off on it for now, huh...? I've thought about this before, but I'm really worried about whether or not I'll still keep leveling up after I hit ten. Maybe "small"-type monsters just max out at level ten? If that's the case, then I'd just be literally throwing away experience points, since I'm still going to have to continue grinding through the middle strata. And there's nooo way I'm going to let that happen. So, maybe I really should try to evolve now, huh?

Hmmmm. Well, for now, I might as well Appraise both of the choices I have for evolution. If you would, please, Milady?

Available evolutionary forms: *Poison Taratekt, Zoa Ere*

Hm? Poison Taratekt is fine, whatever, but what's this Zoa Ere thing? It's not a Taratekt anymore...?

Zoa Ere: *Evolutionary conditions – Small spider-type monster with statistics above a certain level; Assassin title. Description – A small spider-type monster, feared as a symbol of ill fortune. Possesses both great combat strength and stealth.*

Ohh, Lady Appraisal! You've added the evolutionary conditions to your results, have you not? Your greatness continues to amaze, Milady. You leave no stone unturned!

Hmmf. In other words, since my stats are above a certain threshold, this particular evolution is possible. I probably couldn't pick this evolution before now because my stats were too low. Also, I guess this means that some evolutions are linked to titles, huh. Maybe I could evolve into a Poison-type because I had the Poison User title? That seems pretty reasonable...

Chapter 87: I'm evolving!!! (part 3)

Poison Taratekt: Evolutionary conditions – Level 10 Small Poison Taratekt. Description – An adult specimen of a rare subspecies of the species of spider monsters known as the Taratekt. It carries an extremely powerful poison.

I Appraise my Poison Taratekt option, just to be sure. However, if I'm going to evolve, it's definitely going to be the other choice: Zoa Ere. Not only are the requirements to evolve into it very harsh, but according to the Lady Appraisal it has great combat strength. Bonus points: it's still small.

Based on its name and its description, a Zoa Ere seems like an entirely different species than a Taratekt. Should I be nervous about that? If I stay a Taratekt, I know for sure that I'm going to become strong. After all, I've already seen what an evolved Taratekt looks like with my very own eyes: my mother, a super-giant, monstrous spider. There's the Greater Taratekts that I saw in the lower strata as well. I'm so weak that it's not something I can properly imagine, but if I keep evolving along this line I know I'll keep crawling towards that kind of power.

I understand that, but if I do turn into a Poison Taratekt, I'll get bigger, won't I... They say it's better to be too big than too small, but really, cutting-edge technology is all about miniaturization, about packing a lot of power into a tiny package. That is my ultimate goal! At least, that's my official position. Truthfully, I'm pretty concerned that getting big is going to make it difficult for me to actually move around. How much space does my mother actually need to move around like she wants? All the passages I've been able to cross through without any trouble at all may suddenly become too small for me to fit through.

And while we're at it, making myself bigger in these magma-covered middle strata? I can't help but imagine what would happen if I miss my footing on one of these narrow paths! It's not like I'd just splash into a pond, this is magma we're talking about! I'd die! I have zero clue as to how much bigger an adult Taratekt gets, so from where I'm standing there are far, far more minuses than pluses here.

I'm not just worried about not being able to fit down a passage. I'm worried that combat would get harder, too! After all, I'm specced for evasion. If I'm bigger, that means I'm a bigger target, and an evasion-spec really works better if you're already hard to hit. On top of that, if I get bigger, I'm going to get heavier, which means I'm going to get slower, and speed is my strongest suit, right? No. Way.

So, yeah, there's no way I'd want to evolve into a Taratekt. Since I've got a choice to evolve into a different species, I think I want to go with that instead.

It's not like I don't have my concerns, though. I know that a Taratekt can wind up getting pretty strong, but I don't know for sure that a Zoa Ere could as well. Worse, Zoa Ere could be a dead-end in the evolutionary tree. If that's the case, then maximizing my strength as a Taratekt might be a better ideal overall.

Welllllll, I can't really help it if worst comes to worst. Stats are always boosted by level-ups, and you can train them up the hard way, too. Even the weakest of monsters can become really strong if you raise them with loving care. Like me. Yeah, seriously, if you compare me right now to how weak I was when I started out, I'm *way* stronger. I already know what it's like to be so weak that I can die in a single hit, so I think that there's a lot of adversity out there that I can overcome.

I'll evolve into a Zoa Ere.

The problem is still how I'm going to find a way to do so safely, but I've got one idea so far. I'm not actually sure if you could call it safe or risky, but I think it's better than nothing. My solution is, probably, the eel's corpse!!

Welcome to today's three minute arrangement. The item we shall be preparing is the corpse of an eel. It is a material of the highest quality. First, we fully lay out the eel, so that it is straight. Next, we begin to roll the eel, starting from its tail. It is important at this stage to ensure that it is coiled neatly. While doing so, we leave a space at the center of the coil. Once the outline of the circle has been established, we then begin coiling the eel vertically, placing each turn successively higher atop the body. Now, at this point, we climb inside the

coil to continue our work. After the final turns of the coil have been arranged, we place the head of the eel across the center, finishing our arrangement.

With this, our eel shelter is complete. Ahh, this looks great!

Alright! The eel's Dragon Scales are very tough. It'll be difficult to cut through, so I'm pretty confident it'll hold up, even though it's not as good as a real nest. I shouldn't have any trouble evolving in here... probably.

I'm about as ready as I'll ever be.

“Small Poison Taratekt, you are now evolving into a Zoa Ere.”

Yep!

Like a candle being blown out, my consciousness disappears.

**“Evolution has completed. You have become a Zoa Ere. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from evolving: your skill [Accelerated MP Recovery (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4, your skill [Damage Enhancement (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill [Slashing Enhancement (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill [Poison Enhancement (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4, your skill [Battle Spirit (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill [Poison Synthesis (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8, and your skill [Spider Thread (LV 9)] has been raised to level 10. Your [Spider Thread (LV 10)] skill has reached its maximum level and has evolved into a new skill, [All-Purpose Silk (LV 1)]. Your existing skill, [Severing Thread (LV 6)], has been integrated with your new skill, [All-Purpose Silk (LV 1)]. Furthermore, your skill [Shadow Magic (LV 2)] has been increased to level 3, your skill [Poison Magic (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3, your skill [Damage Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill Paralysis Resistance (LV 3) has been raised to level 4, your skill [Fainting Resistance (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3, your skill [Enhanced Touch (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7, your skill [Greater Strength (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4, your skill [Greater Toughness (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4, your skill [Resistance (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4, and your skill [Taboo (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5. From evolving, you have acquired the

new skills [Decaying Attack (LV 1)] and [Slashing Enhancement (LV 1)]. Your new skill, [Slashing Enhancement (LV 1)] has been integrated with your existing skill, [Slashing Enhancement (LV 2)]. Furthermore, from evolving, you have acquired the new skill [Stealth (LV 1)]. Your new skill, [Stealth (LV 1)], has been integrated with your existing skill, [Stealth (LV 7)]. Furthermore, from evolving, you have acquired the new skill [Silence (LV 1)]. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Chapter 88: Zoa Ere

Good morning. Well, I don't know if it actually is morning. I've woken up safely once again. I'm so relieved... This is probably the most dangerous evolution I've had so far. Something could have sent me off to Heaven and there's no waaay I would have noticed...

Huh? You're saying I'd go to Hell, not Heaven? As if someone as upstanding and forthright as myself would ever be condemned to Hell!

Well then, what I'd really like to be doing now is my usual routine of checking my Appraisal results, but right now I need to make sure I really am still safe. My eel-based emergency shelter seems to have held up, but it's possible that monsters could be closing in on me from all sides. So, let's slooowly peek up...

Good. Nothing really out there. Alright, alright, now then, let's pull up my Appraisal window and start eating this... ah, wait, can't do that. I've got to peel off all of these scales first, like I had to do with that snake, otherwise there's no way I can eat it... *Shit*. Ugh, oh well, no choice. I don't feel like I'm too hungry to move right now, so maybe Overeating did its job well? I guess I'll scale this eel while I'm checking my stats, then...

Zoa Ere – LV 1 – (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 195/195 (green)

MP: 1/291 (blue)

SP: 195/195 (yellow), 195/195 (red) +43

Avg. Offense: 251

Avg. Defense: 251

Avg. Magic Power: 245

Avg. Resistance: 280

Avg. Speed: 1272

Skills:

[Automatic HP Recovery (LV 6)] • [Accelerated MP Recovery (LV 4)] •
[MP Consumption Reduction (LV 3)] • [Accelerated SP Recovery (LV 3)] •
[SP Consumption Reduction (LV 3)] • [Damage Enhancement (LV 2)] •
[Slashing Enhancement (LV 2)] • [Poison Enhancement (LV 4)] • [Battle Spirit (LV 2)] •
[Willpower Allocation (LV 2)] • [Greater Poison Attack (LV 3)] • [Decaying Attack (LV 1)] •
[Poison Synthesis (LV 8)] • [Thread Talent (LV 3)] • [All-Purpose Silk (LV 1)] •
[Thread Manipulation (LV 8)] • [Throwing (LV 7)] • [3-D Maneuvering (LV 5)] •
[Concentration (LV 10)] • [Accelerated Thought (LV 3)] • [Foresight (LV 3)] •
[Multitasking (LV 5)] • [Computation (LV 7)] • [Aiming (LV 8)] • [Evasion (LV 7)] •
[Appraisal (LV 9)] • [Detection (LV 6)] • [Stealth (LV 7)] • [Silence (LV 1)] • [Hell] •
[Corruption Magic (LV 3)] • [Shadow Magic (LV 3)] • [Poison Magic (LV 3)] •
[Abyssal Magic (LV 10)] • [Pride] • [Overeating (LV 8)] • [Night Vision (LV 10)] •
[Visible Spectrum Expansion (LV 2)] • [Damage Resistance (LV 2)] •
[Bashing Resistance (LV 2)] • [Slashing Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fire Resistance (LV 2)] •
[Greater Poison Resistance (LV 2)] • [Paralysis Resistance (LV 4)] •
[Petrification Resistance (LV 3)] • [Acid Resistance (LV 4)] • [Decay Resistance (LV 3)] •
[Fainting Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fear Resistance (LV 7)] • [Corruption Resistance (LV 3)] •
[Ignore Pain] • [Pain Tolerance (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Vision (LV 9)] •
[Enhanced Hearing (LV 8)] • [Enhanced Smell (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Taste (LV 7)] •
[Enhanced Touch (LV 7)] • [Vitality (LV 9)] • [Mana Pool (LV 8)] • [Alacrity (LV 9)] •
[Endurance (LV 9)] • [Greater Strength (LV 4)] • [Greater Toughness (LV 4)] •
[Resistance (LV 4)] • [Kartikeya (LV 3)] • [Taboo (LV 5)] • [n % I = W]

Skill points available: 500

Titles:

[Filth Eater] • [Kin Eater] • [Assassin] • [Monster Slayer] • [Poison User] • [Silk User] •
[Merciless] • [Monster Slaughterer] • [Lord of Pride]

Huh? Uhh... wait a sec. Let's take another look at that. My eyes might have deceived me.
Let's just double-check those numbers real... quick...

Eh? Ehh?! EHHHHHHHHH?!

Wh... huh? Eh? That's an *enormous* increase. Isn't that a seriously *enormous* increase?!

Is this for real? Can it really go up by that much? Oh. Is this what it meant by "great combat strength"...?

Wait, this is okay, right? It's okay if I got this strong all at once, right? It's okay, since I got this strong, for me to get kinda carried away now, right? It's okay right? It's got to be okay right?

Heh. Heh heh heh. MY TIME HAS FINALLY COOOME!!

In a single blow, I have blasted through the bottleneck that was my terrible stats! Sure, they're not anywhere as high as this eel's was, but if any of the small fry from around here try to shove me around, I'm strong enough that I won't die anymore! Heh, heh heh heh. Heheheheheheeeee!

My skill levels also went up a ton. I've got a gooood feeling about this. Wait, Taboo went up too? It's at level five?! You mean it's already halfway to max level?! If my theory's right, *something*'s going to happen when that skill makes it to level ten. Not good. Well, it's only halfway, still. I'm in the clear, still, probably.

Next, it looks like I've got a bunch more skills I haven't seen before. "Decaying Attack"... seriously? Do you mean *that* Decay? That one attribute that was even worse than what I had imagined it being, once I finally Appraised it? That Decay, right? I can use that now, huuuh... Man, I'm freaking amazing.

Silence is another skill I don't think I've seen before... I'm pretty sure I know what this does, but it doesn't hurt to verify, right?

Silence: *Dampens the sounds the user produces.*

Yep, just like I thought. All right! Ninja level: up! I wonder, am I going to be able to pull off an actual ambush, now?

Next is a skill that I am *extremely* curious about. Spider Silk and Severing Thread have both disappeared, and All-Purpose Silk has appeared in their place. This is probably the evolved form of Spider Silk, but what happened to Severing Thread?

All-Purpose Silk: *Produces customizable silk threads. Attributes: Adhesion, elasticity, resilience, texture, strength, size, imbued attribute (slash, bash, impact), imbued resistance*

It looks like what I get from this over ordinary Spider Silk is the ability to imbue attributes and resistances into my silk. It looks like maybe “slash” is the same slashing that I’ve been using with Severing Thread, “bash” is probably the bashing attribute, and “impact” is probably some kind of ballistic attribute. Bashing is probably using it like an ordinary whip. Impact feels like I can make my thread explode out with a kind of shockwave. Anything that it impacts would probably take a ton of damage. Whoa, if this wasn’t the middle layer, this would be *ridiculously* useful! Man, I’ve got to get out of here fast so that I can try this out!

As I was confirming all of my stats, I finally finished scaling this eel. Right, let’s actually dig into this thing.

...Delicious. Its flavor is subtly different than the catfish. I have to say it again: delicious.

This time, evolving didn’t completely drain my stamina. Instead, my Overeating stock got massively depleted. That alone is proof that Overeating does excellent work in this case. It looks like I don’t actually need to keep a stockpile of food around me when I evolve, then, since I can just eat it all in advance and keep it in my internal stock. So, what I guess I need to do here is just keep eating and eating until I can fill up my stock completely. If I had to guess based on my previous numbers, I’d say that my stock can probably contain an amount that’s about one hundred times my skill level, so I can fit eight hundred points of backup stamina in there right now.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Overeating (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9.”

As soon as I think that, Overeating leveled up. I guess I can fit even more in there now.

Chapter 89. Changing and Evolving

Speaking of changes, my skill point total really rocketed up. I thought I was only getting twenty points per level, but I think I got 280 since the last time I checked. If I got sixty from the three levels I got after killing the eel, where did the remaining 220 come from? Is that my bonus for evolving? If that's the case, then I guess my previous calculations were incorrect.

Well, I got them, and it's best not to look a gift horse in the mouth, after all. I've got five hundred points! I wonder what kinds of awesome skills I can find in the tree now? I'm definitely going to have to take a close look at this list later.

Right now, there's something that I'm far more interested in. While I was peeling the eel, I noticed that there's a few things about my body that have changed.

The sharp points of my two forelegs have grown, turning into slender, wicked sickles. These things are amazingly sharp, perfect for slicing. Peeling all of the scales off of that snake took forever, but this time, scaling the eel was lightning fast by comparison. There were far too many scales to count, but I was able to cleanly slice both skin and scale straight off. Now, is that because these sickles are super sharp, or because my offense stat went up?

On top of that, my body is now black. It was kind of dark before¹, but now it's jet black, a black so deep that light barely reflects off it at all. It's blacker than night, blacker than pitch!

I don't have a mirror so I can't check my whole body for changes, but I don't think there's any other major change, is there? My size certainly doesn't seem to have changed. It seems, though, like there's probably a lot of minor changes that I might not even be aware of.

When I was evolving along the Taratekt tree, not a whole lot was changing about my appearance at all. This time, though, I evolved into an entirely different species. If I were to compare before and after side by side, I bet there'd be a lot of differences. It really kind of sucks that I don't have a mirror right now. There's no way for me to get a good look at my own appearance.

Well, at the very least, nothing feels particularly strange or out of place when I'm moving around. It looks like none of my major parts have changed around very much, and I can move around basically exactly as I'm used to. Funnily enough, I never really thought about body parts changing around during my previous evolutions, huh... I breathe a sigh of relief, glad that nothing's changed.

These sickles, though, now *these* are a big change, huh. Somehow, I feel like they should make a "shing!" kind of noise when I get ready to use them. Plus, these sickles really give off a vibe that makes me think of Death's scythe. Well, the species description did say that a Zoa Ere is a symbol of ill fortune, and between my sickles and my Decaying Attacks, I guess I fit that description preeetty well. My mental image of myself is still very much a ninja, but now I feel kinda like a ninja of death.

Let's take a look at the other skills that leveled up. Greater Strength and Toughness both went up again, which means more bonus stats on level-up, which makes me very happy. I may have gotten way stronger, but I'm still absolutely puny next to that eel.

Looks like Poison Synthesis, Poison Magic, and Shadow Magic also went up. I still have no idea how to use magic so I don't really care about the other two, but let's check to see what new goodies Poison Synthesis has for me.

Imbue Paralysis Attribute: Applies the Paralysis attribute to the created poison.

Wat.

S... s-s-s... seriously?! Did... did I just get something absolutely ridiculous? Poison Synthesis was already the most useful skill in my entire set down here in the middle layer, and now it's gotten even better!! Whoa. I *have* to try this out immediately.

Just like that, I immediately try adding a paralytic component to my Deadly Spider Venom. I'm going to have to wait to figure out what sort of effects it will actually have until my next actual encounter. ...Hm, although, my Deadly Spider Venom is, y'know, *deadly*, so I don't think I'd be able to see the paralysis set in before my target instantly dies. Maybe if I add

Paralysis to my Weak Poison... yeah, this'll work. Next monster I see, I'm going to give them a little taste of this paralytic-imbued Weak Poison, and see what happens. Ahh, man, I'm *waaay* looking forward to this...

Ah, might as well take a look at the extra spells I got for Poison and/or Shadow Magic, huh. Couldn't hurt, right?

Poison Shield: *Temporarily increases the target's poison resistance.*

Hmmm. A spell that boosts my own poison resistance, huh... That's compleeetely worthless. Seriously, wouldn't someone who uses a lot of poison already have really good poison resistance? Is there any actual point to Poison Magic even *existing* at all? Either way, it's not like I can actually use it.

Ah, wait a sec. Is this maybe something that I can use on an ally? If I cast this on all of my allies, then we'd have a pretty big advantage against a poison-wielding enemy. Ahhh! I've always been alone down here, so I never even considered anything like that. It looks like this is a spell that's actually useful under normal circumstances. Depending on the opponent, this could be a serious trump card. I see, I see... Well, it's not like I actually care either way!

...Huh? Hold on, wait a sec. Is it really impossible for me to use any magic?

I just got a bunch of ranks in both Multitasking and Computation. Isn't it about time that I actually start being able to use Detection?Well, it's been a while, why don't we give it a shot?

Inhaaale... exhaaale. Right!

Detection: *ON!*

Guh!

Grrrrrngh!

Agh!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Calculation (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Multitasking (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Detection (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Corruption Resistance (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

OFF!!

Whoof... That suuuucked... But, I think I was able to keep it on for little bit more this time. It still took everything I had to keep it on for as long as I did, but it's still a step forward. The pattern is unmistakable. I still haven't mastered it yet, but I can definitely see the light at the end of the tunnel!

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *This isn't a mistranslation. The light novel illustrations show her as a whitish-pink, but in the web novel she's black. I haven't read the LN, so I don't know if they changed it in the actual text or if the artist is taking liberties here.*

Chapter 90: Patience

I stroll leisurely through the middle strata. My belly is full of eel, so I no longer need to be worried about spontaneously fainting from hunger. I really don't need to be actively hunting anything down right now, so I'm just kind of exploring at my own pace. I'm in a pretty good mood, so I can almost put aside how stupidly hot it is down here. ...Almost.

I can't see a single monster nearby, so I think I'm about ready to finally take a look at that skill list. Evolving this time got me all the way up to five hundred points in a single go, so I'm positive that I can find a really cool skill in this list if I look hard. All of the skills I've bought have really been pulling their weight (well, except for Detection), so if this streak continues I'm bound to find something awesome in here.

Pride doesn't seem like it's really had any negative effects, other than giving me an extra rank of Taboo. And Taboo doesn't seem like it's doing anything to me right now, so it's really not that much of a negative, is it? Pride has given me so many ridiculous bonuses that it really looks like the positives vastly outweigh that single negative. I have zero idea as to why it only cost me one hundred skill points. With effects like that, I could absolutely see it costing an entire thousand!

It might be a little bit too much for me to hope for another convention-defying skill like Pride, but I should definitely be proactive about picking up any new, useful skills that I find. No point in saving up all these skill points, after all. Might as well spend them since I got them. I think it's going to be extremely inefficient for me to keep stockpiling skills in the hopes of unlocking the very high-cost skills.

Now then, M'lady Appraisal, if you wouldn't mind! I double-Appraise my skill point count, and start looking over the list that appears.

Hmmmm. There are still a ton of hundred-point skills here that I could buy, huh... A lot of these don't seem like I absolutely need to pick them up immediately, but since I've got some free time, maybe I should try to work on earning some proficiency with them? If I have that kind of luxury, though, I should probably be spending it on grinding out some

more useful skills. Ahh, but there's also a chance that those skills are going to get *really* good if I max them out and they evolve, huh...

Hmmmm. What a decision. Well, I should probably take a look at all the skills that cost more than two hundred points, since I couldn't see them before.

Hmmmm. I can't really find any super-broken skills like Pride in here, huh... I'm feeling kinda disappointed, I guess I might have gotten my hopes up anyway, huh... I guess I was expecting this, huh...

...At least, that's what I was expecting to say.

I found one, though. A broken skill.

Patience (500): *The power of n %, a strength almost rivaling that of the gods. Expands the user's divine domain. While the user has MP remaining, no source of damage can reduce them to less than 1 HP. Furthermore, allows for interference in the MA domain, surpassing the W system.*

Yet another skill full of mysterious keywords... And this one's also got an ability so good I'd almost say the system was joking. Does activating this thing mean that I'll burn mana instead of taking damage? I don't know how good the conversion rate on this is, but does this mean that I can just keep attacking like a zombie as long as I've still got any mana left over? I have no clue. This ability is so good, it's practically *dirty*.

This time, there's no room for doubt! Gotta click that button.

“You currently possess 500 skill points. The skill [Patience] can be acquired for 500 skill points. Would you like to acquire it now?”

Yyyeep!

“You have acquired the skill [Patience]. You have 0 skill points remaining.”

I am the wielder of Pride! Retreat is not even in my vocabulary! I shall obtain every one of these skills! Now, Taboo! Come at me! I care not!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Taboo (LV 5)] has been raised to level 7.”

Oops, uh, sorry. I actually do care.

“Requirements have been met. You have earned the title [Lord of Patience], and have been awarded the skills [Corruption Immunity] and [Conviction]. Your existing skill, [Corruption Resistance (LV 4)], has been integrated with your new skill, [Corruption Immunity].”

Aaargh, just as I feared, Taboo leveled. Twice, this time! Well, whatever. The important part here is that I got a title! I've *got* to check this out, right now!

Lord of Patience: *Acquired Skills – [Corruption Immunity] and [Conviction]. Acquisition criteria – Acquire the skill [Patience]. Effect – Increases the user's defense and resistance statistics. Unlocks the Evil Eye skills. Increases the rate of proficiency gain towards resistance skills. Grants the holder a Ruler's Privileges. Description: A title awarded to those who rule over Patience.*

Ahh. Just as I thought. *Just* as I thought, another OP title. Bonus points towards defense and resistance! They each got a hundred points, so now my defense is 351 and my resistance is 380. That's already more than enough, right? I'd think that's pretty OP already, for a title.

Giving me a proficiency bonus so that I can level up my resistance skills more quickly is also huge! Since I'm evasion-specced, I get hit very rarely, which means that my resistance skills don't actually tend to level up very often. This bonus fills in that gap nicely, which I'm really pleased about.

Here's something that really caught my interest: "evil eye skills". I reeeeally want some of these. If I pick up one of these skills, I get to say things like, "Urgh... my right eye is throbbing!!" or "*THIS* is what it means to kill something," right? This is exactly the kind of power that every delusional middle-schooler pretends to have. I want it!! ...But I just used all my skill pooooints!! Aargh, I really need to level up! Only more skill points can save me now...

Lastly, the title gave me Corruption Immunity and Conviction. Corruption Immunity is probably just max-leveled Corruption Resistance. Since that skill provided me with some sort of defense against attacks that directly violate my soul, Corruption Immunity should provide me complete protection. Now, if an opponent comes at me with Corruption Magic, I'll have no reason to fear.

Conviction: *Weighs the accumulated sins of a target as recognized by the system, then deals unblockable damage equivalent to the price of those crimes.*

Wow. So, in other words, this is a huge attack I can unleash on sinners. Unblockable damage is terrifying. This, however, has the same kind of stink to it that my Hell skill does, too. The stink of uselessness.

I try it out, but of course it doesn't do anything. It probably just misfired and had no effect because there wasn't any target, but I'm positive that this is going to be pretty freaking worthless either way.

Well, even if I can't actually use Conviction, this has been basically nothing but positives. Taboo may have leveled, but I couldn't help that, it was going to do what it was going to do. Taboo doesn't really feel like it's going to just straight-up kill me when it hits level ten, so I think I'm going to have to let this disadvantage run its course.

And, way more importantly than that, my stats have gone up *and* my skill roster has been enriched. I've got to be the strongest around, don't you think?

Katia Story 1: The Pessimistic Daughter of the Duke

“Miss Okazaki, did we overdo it a bit today?”

“Not at a~all!”

“Sue’s bloodlust isn’t really important, and it’s not like Shun meant any harm by using Appraisal.”

“Katia, you’ve been too she~eltered! Didn’t you kno~ow? Even just being a little intimidating is dangerous, you kno~ow!”

“Really, huh...”

“That’s why it’s best not to use Appraisal recklessly~y! If your target has the same Appra~aisal level, or if they have good intuition, they can actually tell when you activa~ate it. Do you remember that weird feeling you got when you first met Potimu~us?”

“Ahh, that uncomfortable feeling. Is that what being Appraised feels like?”

“Preci~isely! In some situations, that alone can be seen as an act of aggressio~on! We~ell, if you’re in a really dangerous situation, you should already be thinking of e~everyone but your friends as your enemies, so it might not matter at that po~oint!”

“So you’re saying that they’ll kill me without even asking first?”

“They mi~ight!”

“So, Miss Okazaki—”

“How about you don’t ask that questio~on? I already told yo~ou, neither of us really gains anything from you Appraising me~e, but I guess you’re going to take that as an answer itself since you’re good at conje~ecture, hmm?”

“Ah, okay. I guess that just tells me that you’ve done a lot of things so far, huh.”

“That’s ri~ight!”

“And I guess we still can’t meet any of the other students you’ve gathered up?”

“No, you ca~an’t.”

“Why not?”

“I can’t tell you tha~at either!”

“Hey, Miss Okazaki. Did you really manage to save twelve of our classmates? You had the whole wide world to search, how the hell did you find anyone? How am I supposed to take you at your word when you can’t even tell me how you did it?”

“Cross my heart and hope to di~ie, I’m telling you the tru~uth! My methods are still se~cret, but I’m definitely not lying about the number of students I managed to sa~ave.”

“So, what about the others, the ones you haven’t found yet? Be honest with me here, Miss Okazaki. You said there were six you hadn’t found yet. How many were you really, actually not able to find?”

“...Two. The other four were already dead.”

“...Oh.”

“I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have anything to apologize for, Miss Okazaki. Can I ask, who was it that died?”

“Hayashi Kouta, Wakaba Hiiro, Kogure Naofumi, and Sakurasaki Issei. Those four.”

“...Oh. ...I guess I can understand why you’ve almost stopped searching entirely.”

“I’m still going to look for the other two~o!”

“Hey, why are the elves helping you search? I’m guessing you explained our situation to them, but can we really depend on them?”

“That’s just something you’ll have to tru~ust me on!”

“Even though you’re keeping so many secrets?”

“Yep, and this is another o~one!”

“I’m not like Shun, I can’t just trust someone based on my gut. I really want to believe you, but if you keep hiding so much from me, I can’t trust you from the bottom of my heart.”

“That’s the smart thing to do, tho~ough! Shun is a li~ittle too honest, you know.”

“I agree with you there. I think that guy would be completely useless if he didn’t have me around...”

“Oh?! Ohohoho?! Is this the seed of something that has yet to spro~out? This is going to be interesti~ing!”

“Huh? What are you talking about? ...You’ve got on a really creepy smile, Miss Okazaki. The fact that you look like a little kid right now makes that smile even ten times creepier, too.”

“Divine punishme~ent!”

“Ow?!”

“Katia?”

“Yes, Sue, what is it?”

“What’s going on between you and Brother?”

“Why, we’re friends, are we not? What of it?”

“Liar. You’re not just normal friends are you? It’s the same with that elf you call “teacher”.

And with the Saint candidate, and the Sword Emperor’s heir. What *are* all of you?”

“Am I the really the person who should be answering that question for you?”

“What do you mean?”

“I wonder, are you truly looking for *my* answer to that question?”

“Maybe...”

“*Maybe* you should ask that question of Shun. Even if I were to answer that for you, you would surely still be dissatisfied.”

“I... guess so.”

“I have somewhat of an idea as to what you might be feeling. Perhaps you should convey those emotions to the person who they are truly directed at, should you not?”

“...Okay. Sorry, Katia. And, thanks.”

“You are most welcome.”

“...Man, it was okay for me to just shove that entire problem off onto Shun, right? I mean, that sounds like a sibling problem to me. I’ve got nothing to do with it, but she still tried to drag me in... I gotta talk to Shun tomorrow.”

“Hey, Ooshima, why are you in here, changing clothes with the girls?”

“Huh? ...Ah, my bad, Hasebe. I’ve been living this new life for so long that I just stopped thinking about things like that. If it bothers you, I could do this at some other time. Or do you want me to go somewhere else?”

“Uh... ah... hmm.”

“Hey, what’s with that reaction?”

“Ah, um. I didn’t expect such a calm response, I guess. Aren’t you supposed to be getting really flustered and trying to explain yourself right now?”

“Wellll, ever since I reincarnated, girls’ bodies really haven’t been doing it for me. I’d be lying if I said that this wouldn’t be absolute bliss if I were still a guy, but now I don’t feel anything when I look at girls. Definitely no guilt, shame, or anything like that.”

“Huhhh... don’t you feel a little shy or embarrassed?”

“I’ve grown up as the daughter of a duke, so I had female attendants with me whenever I changed my clothes or took a bath, right? I had to get past ‘shy’ a long time ago.”

“O... oh. That sounds like it was rough.”

“Yeah. That’s why I’m so glad to be free of all that now that I’m here at a boarding school. All of the other pampered rich girls here are whining about having to do everything themselves, but not me.”

“Yeah, I’ve been thinking the same thing.”

“Oh, so? Do you still want me to go find somewhere else to change?”

“Ah, I guess not. I feel better about it now that you’ve told me all that, I guess? You’re going to have to get used to this at some point, so I guess you can stay.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I have a lot more experience with being a woman than you do, after all, and it is my sacred duty to be a guide. Leave it to me!”

“B... be gentle, please.”

Chapter 91: Detection, you were a formidable foe.

Ah! Now that Corruption Resistance turned into Corruption Immunity, I won't get those awful headaches from using Detection, will I? Those were basically like Corruption attacks, right? It's probably okay for me to call those "attacks", I guess? Normal headaches aren't able to blast all the way through Pain Tolerance like that, you know? So, if I'm now nullifying Corruption attacks completely instead of just resisting them, then I won't get those headaches, right?

Let's try it out.

Inhaaaale, exhaaaale. Right!

Detection: ON!

...Whoa. This is amazing. Seriously, this is way amazing. I used to be too focused on powering through my headaches, but now that they're gone this is suddenly seriously amazing, huh...

The splitting headache that I always got when I turned on Detection is gone. Well, no, if I want to be perfectly honest there is a little bit of one left, but it's totally easy to ignore thanks to Pain Tolerance. This is the kind of feverish headache that you get when you work your brain far too hard. After all, the amount of information that I'm getting out of Detection is enormous.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Computation (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Multitasking (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Detection (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8.”

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Divine Domain Expansion (LV 1)].”

It sounds like my skills just leveled up, but I'll check on those in a bit. Right now, I need to let myself enjoy this feeling.

I am so happy that I can use Detection now, but the sensations I'm getting from having it activated overwhelm my emotions. Every bit of information about everything that's around me is being assembled right in front of me. The flow of mana, the chemical composition of these rocks, the currents in the air, and so many other things are being poured into my head.

Feelings of omniscience bubble up in my mind. I suddenly know everything about everything that's around me. All these things that should be impossible for me to understand are made clear to me, if just a little bit, through the power of this skill. And glimpsing the truth of the universe, even if it is only just that little bit, is like gazing out over an endless sea of information. Even this tiny cavern I'm in suddenly seems so vast. My awe and respect of the natural world has grown stronger than ever.

Oh no, I think I might be starting to cry. ...Although I still don't know if spiders have tear ducts.

Let's turn this off for a minute.

Whoof. That was amazing. How can I even try describe what that felt like? It was like... lying on the grass on a crystal-clear night, seeing the whole night sky glittering with stars above you. That's as close as I can get.

Aaaaahh, I want to bask in that a little longer, but let's switch to another feeling. Detection *worked*. Should I leave it on all the time, now that it won't kill me? Hmmmm. It's just... well... maybe such a high-efficiency skill might wind up being really inconvenient. If there's so much information coming at me, then it might prove distracting, and in the middle of a battle the last thing I want is to lose my concentration.

Although, if I get used to having it on, it won't be so bad, right? After all, when I first got Appraisal, I made myself sick from constantly spamming it, but I'm fine now that I've

gotten used to it. So, although it might be kind of dangerous when I'm just starting out, I think I should leave Detection on all the time. It levels up the rest of my skills, too, so leaving it on will do good things for me in the future.

So, without further ado, once again, Detection: ON!

Whooooa. This really is waaay amazing... But! This isn't the time for me to stand here and be emotional about it. What I should do now is take a look at that skill that I somehow got just now.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Multitasking (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Divine Domain Expansion (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

And as soon as I think it, that skill levels up again. What the heck is this? I think the description for Patience also said something about Divine Domains. Something about expanding them, right? And this is more expansion? So what you're saying is that my Divine Domain is getting pretty huge, huh? Well, let's Appraise it, to start.

Divine Domain Expansion: *Expands the user's Divine Domain.*

Well, ain't that an explanation. Whatever, though, because this is why the Lady Appraisal truly is so reliable! Please, Appraise this a second time!

Divine Domain: *The area, deep within the soul, which all living beings possess. The well from which all life springs, and the final thing upon which you may rely.*

Umm? I don't get it. Well, I get that it's an important part of my soul, but what does expanding that do? Hmm... It's still a mystery, huh... I'm glad that the skill level went up, but I can't tell if I'm feeling any different...

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Computation (LV 9)] has been raised to level 10. Your [Computation] skill has reached its maximum level and has evolved into a new skill, [Rapid Computation (LV 1)].”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Detection (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9.”

My skill levels are still going up this fast?! Computation just hit max level! And now it's Rapid Computation. That looks like it's just a straight upgrade.

Now then, the thing I was really hoping that I would get out of Detection, from the very start, was detecting enemies. My own enemy-detection skills are naturally super high, though, so I've actually been getting along just fine without it, more or less. When I couple those skills with Detection, it will be impossible to describe my enemy-spotting as anything but perfect. Now, it is absolutely impossible to sneak up on me, is it not?! I shall not be ambushed!

And next up, of course, is Mana Perception. If my theory is correct, if I have both this and Mana Manipulation, then I can use both of them in conjunction to finally, *finally* be able to cast my magic. Probably. Then I'll finally be able to unleash the dark magicks I have been hoarding for so long: Abyssal Magic and Corruption Magic!!

But, skill points, though! Uuugggggh! I definitely do not regret buying Patience, but *man* does not having any skill points right now leave the bitterest taste in my mouth. Argh, and my next step was buying Evil Eye skills! What do I dooo? I want both of those! Ghaah! This is absolutely the first-worldiest of first-world problems, but I seriously can't decide!!

Chapter 92: Once again I have cut a worthless object...

Ohh! Found some! Before me, I see two seahorses swimming calmly around on the surface of the magma. At least, those are the only two things in my actual field of view, but Mr. Detection is telling me that there's a single catfish swimming underneath the magma. The three of them aren't attacking each other at all, just calmly swimming through the magma. Hmmf... They're probably the same species, so maybe it's not unusual for them to be together like this?

Two seahorses, one catfish. That's the kind of formation that I would have hesitated to fight against before I evolved, but I think it's finally about time for me to test out the combat potential of my new body. Plus, before I evolved, I took down an eel! How can I possibly call these underevolved monsters anything but small fry? There's no way I'm going to lose.

Heh heh heh. So, if this is how we're doing things, how do you three feel about being the guinea pigs for my new body and my new skills?

First thing's first: got to start off with a sneak attack. I'll throw a rock, as usual. I think... I'll skip the poison for now. I want to see what kind of damage I can get just by throwing a plain ol' rock. It used to take off five, maybe six health, so it's going to be, what, doubled?

Hey, seahorse! You so Pringles! Where yo curleh mustace at?!¹

...Is *anybody* going to get that meme?

Oh, it hit! It hit! It... hit? What was that stupendous sound, though? It sounded like a rock getting smashed. Like, *kgsssshh*, you know? *Kgsssshh*. The seahorse is sinking down beneath the magma, too... did it just die?

Ah! It bobbed back up! ...Whoa?! Its missing a third of its health! Seriously?

Oh, here comes a fireball... So slowly?! Uh, is this for real? Just a plain, simple pitch? Not a curveball, not a slider, just an ordinary fastball coming straight at me? This is waaay too

slow compared to what that eel was throwing at me. I could sidestep this one while humming a jaunty little tune. ...I can't actually hum, though.

Seriously... I'm actually kind of shocked about how much better I've gotten, even better than I was expecting! What should I do? At this rate, I could beat them just by chucking rocks at them. If they die while in the magma, though, their corpses are just going to sink down and I won't be able to get them, huh... And I *do* still have a surplus of stamina thanks to Overeating, but I really want to build my stocks back up, huh...

Ah, here comes the catfish. Hm? Is it coming up here to help the seahorses? I guess they really do have some sort of bond of kinship, since they're party of the same evolutionary chain. The other seahorse is also moving closer to help out its ally. I guess that they usually don't roam around together, but they'll help each other out if one of their own happens to be in danger nearby. Oh man, I just realized the worst case scenario: if another eel shows up to help these guys out. I reeeeally hope that doesn't happen...

The catfish spits out a fireball. Yyyyep. It's slow. Compared to the seahorses' ones, this is much faster and bigger, but it's obvious that it's not even in the same league as that eel's. I lazily step to one side, contemplating things like "friendship" or whatever.

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Parallel Thought (LV 8)] has been raised to level 9."

Aaaah! That's because I was thinking about whatever while I was fighting, huh.

Well, for now, let's just keep dodging around like this and wait for their mana to run dry. I could keep throwing rocks at them, but if I do that then their corpses really will just sink into the magma, so I really just need to lure them up here onto solid ground before I finish them off. Ah, no, it's okay if I hit the catfish, right? It's only the seahorses that look like they'll die if I hit them too hard. To be perfectly honest, none of their fireballs are even coming close to grazing me, despite there being three creatures' worth of them coming at me at once. Since I've got so much spare time, then, why don't I work on cranking out some experience for Throwing and Aiming?

Let's do this again! Oh I got da mango catfish... yo I think of New York *Knicks!*¹²

Yeah! Got him, got him. Hm. As you'd expect from a catfish, it didn't lose much health at all. It's got a great defense stat. If we're just looking at the raw physical defense numbers, it's almost as good as mine...

...Wait. Now that I'm thinking about it, has my defense stat actually gotten higher than a catfish's?! Man, this is seriously incredible now that I think about it. Even though I look like a frail little spider no matter how you look at me, I'm somehow even tougher than that catfish, covered in dragon scales... Truly, a mystery of the world.

While I've been thinking about these useless things, one of the seahorses ran out of mana and is slowly crawling up onto solid ground. Hey, idiot. Yeah, you, the idiot inching towards me. You saw me dodge all of your attacks, so it should be *reeeeally* obvious how much more powerful I am than you. ...Ah, wait a sec. I think I just realized something pretty awful. Catfish... run, when they see they can't win, right?

I can't let that happen, right? If a seahorse gets away, I don't actually care, but you, catfish? You're going nowhere, asshole. Read my lips: you're, going, no, where. Whoa, look. You're shaking now, aren't you? Don't be scared, don't be scared, okaaaay? Just get up here onto the ground, okay? Immediately. It's okay. You're not scared, after aaaall...

Oi, wait! Don't run, jerk! ...Agh, get out of my way, you stupid seahorse! I swing the sickles on my forelegs, slashing out at the seahorse that's blocking my path. With a whisper, they pass cleanly through its body, and the seahorse splits in two.

Huh? Whaaaaat? Did *I* just do that? Oh *man*, my sickles are amazing. Ah, this might have been an accident, but... is this the first monster I've ever just straight-up slaughtered with my bare hands? I think that literally every other kill has been through poison. Oh, I guess a bunch of monkeys fell to their deaths, but, still, this is my very first hands-on murder. Even though it was my first time, it happened so quickly I didn't feel a thing...

Hey wait a minute, CATFISH! Ah... aaaaahh... it ran away... my catfish... my tasty, tasty catfish...

The other seahorse seems to have run out of mana as well and is crawling its way up onto solid ground. Good. *I have some frustrations to vent.*

First off, let's try adding a little bit of paralysis to my Weak Poison. As the seahorse starts to charge straight at me, I zip over to the side. It stares blankly at me as it hurtles past, right into the ball of poison that I just synthesized.

Oh? Ohh!! It's going limp, it's going limp! So *this* is paralysis, huh... Wait, its health is dropping like a rock! Why?! ...Ah, Weak Poison still is poison, after all, so it still does damage... Wait, no, I was deliberately trying to only test out the paralysis component, so I thought I made the damage as low as I possibly could. How the heck is it still that powerful? ...Don't tell me, is my poison damage based on my stats, too?

If that's the case, then, man, this was just Weak Poison, right? What the heck is my Deadly Spider Venom going to be able to do now? It *wrecked* that eel, before. ...Just thinking about it is pretty terrifying.

Looks like my combat potential increased even more than I thought.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. Originally ヲンナハズハ (‘‘konna hazu waaa’’), a MUGEN meme from, like, 2008. Substituted with an equally old, equally hype meme from the western FGC.

Chapter 93. That which crosses the strata

Caaaatfiiish~! Where aaaare yoooou~! Come out and plaaaay~!

As I aimlessly wander through these molten caverns, half-heartedly searching for catfish, I discover a particular something. ...No, “discover” isn’t the right word. I saw it. It was right there. It was so ludicrously conspicuous that it would be extremely unusual for me to *not* see it.

Here, in front of me, is a gigantic hole. I dropped down into the lower strata to begin with by falling into a large shaft, but this is much, much larger than that. This pit ties together the top and bottom of the dungeon.

That’s right, this pit is connected with the upper strata. Most likely, if I climb up this thing, I’ll finally get back up there, and if I descend, I’ll go back down to the lower strata. I mean, that’s what I think would probably happen. I’m just going to go around it, though.

...Ah, that wasn’t a joke. I’m actually pretty unhappy that you thought my sense of humor was bad enough that I’d make such a terrible joke.

So, leaving that bit of business aside, this hole. Whenever I look at it, Mister Detection starts pinging danger warnings at me. And that’s putting it lightly. The *instant* it entered my field of view, Detection started pinging. It’s blatantly obvious that this thing is extremely dangerous.

So, right now, I am in the middle of carefully navigating myself around it, making a huge circle to avoid getting anywhere near that thing. It’s that bad! I know how this trope plays out: if I get too close, I’m going to have a *bad time*. All this right when I thought that evolving had finally made me STRONK.¹

Yeah. Nothing good has ever come out of me getting cocky, so far. Nothing even remotely *okay* has ever come out of me getting cocky. I remember that now. A modest heart is the

best heart. So, don't mind me, I'm just going to do everything I possibly can to avoid triggering that trope.

That's right. I'm not getting close to that hole. I'm not getting *anywhere* close to that hole, at all. And don't think that this is the part where I yell "psych" and dash straight towards it. I'm not a comedian.²

While thinking all of that to myself, I make my way far, far away from that hole. Then, right when it's just still barely in my sight, Mister Detection starts screaming. This is maximum danger. I'm cowering in the shadow of a rock before I even realize it. I risk taking the briefest of glances, and there I see, before my very eyes, crawling down the hole from above, **that.**

I can still see it clearly, even from this enormous distance. It's that huge. Its carapace is black as pitch. Eight bright red eyes glimmer strangely atop its head. Eight spindly legs cling to the vertical walls as it climbs. Five sharp claws at the end of each leg, almost like a human hand. An enormous jaw that looks like it could devour the world.

What this thing is, is a monster. A *real* monster, unlike those poor excuses I've seen so far. I don't think there's a single thing alive that could possibly stand up to such a creature. This is the same kind of overwhelming difference in power that I felt when I fought the Earth Dragon. I'm almost a little upset that I'm out of range for Lady Appraisal to do her job. I'm sure that its stats are so obnoxiously powerful that I'd start laughing.

Isn't that right, Mother? This is my second chance encounter with this enormous spider.

It's absurd to think that there could be more than one of these incomprehensible existences crawling around the dungeon. If there were, I'd be long dead. No, this is very clearly the same creature I caught a glimpse of when I was born: my mother.

She moves leisurely down the hole. Her movements are almost grand, or majestic, making her seem like the true queen of the entire dungeon. I can't think of a single creature in these caverns that could stop her stately parade. With how far down the power curve I am, I can't say anything for certain, but... is my mother even stronger than an Earth Dragon?

I want to get close enough to Appraise her, but that's straight-up suicidal. Curiosity killed the cat, after all, and I'm not going to let it kill me. ...Because I'm a spider, not a cat.

I'd been wondering about my mother. She was obviously too powerful to be wandering around in the upper strata, but it looks like she uses holes like this to move between the different strata. Maybe she was up in the upper layer just by chance. Her true habitat is probably in the lower strata, or maybe even a stratum further beneath that. Even the strongest monsters in the lower strata couldn't possibly pose a threat to my mother.

I'm glad that I decided to stay far away from that hole. This isn't a battlefield where there's even a question of whether or not I can win. Just like with the Earth Dragon, my demise is assured the very instant she catches sight of me. She is a terrible calamity, walking on eight legs.

Then, abruptly, she stops dead, staring fixedly at whatever it was that she noticed. Then, slowly, she turns to point her enormous jaws in that direction.

In the next instant, the whole world trembled.

This is not a figure of speech. It didn't just *feel* like the world trembled, the earth actually shook beneath my feet. There was such a sudden and stupendous crash that it felt like the dungeon itself screamed in pain. Let me use sound effects to describe it, comic-book style: kshhBOOOM!! Rmblrmbtblmbl.

That attack was so far beyond my level of comprehension that I don't even have any idea what it was. But I can clearly see that there is now an enormous, empty crater where there once was a much smaller pool of magma. Nobody but my mother will ever be able to know if there was even something there to begin with. Did something blunder into my mother's field of view, or was there something already there that offended her? We'll never know, because whatever might have been in there has been obliterated. Not even a tiny scrap could remain after an attack like that.

Magma slowly starts to trickle into the brand new crater. I'm sure the new pool that will form is going to be much bigger than the old one.

I'm really glad that attack was not aimed at me. If it was, I would have been dead before I even realized what was happening. I desperately hide behind the rock, making myself as absolutely still as I possibly can to avoid detection.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Stealth (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Silence (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8.”

Then, slowly, my mother disappeared down into the hole.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. Originally, she described herself here as *TUEEEE* (a slang misspelling of a slang pronunciation of “strong”) which is a meme thrown around on light novel forums to describe particularly egregious Mary Sues, with origins in gaming. Substituted with “stronk”, a similar meme with similar origins.

2. Originally, this was referring to the Ostrich’s Law, a gag used in Japanese variety shows. Basically, there’s a task that person A isn’t really sold on doing, but he says he’s going to do it anyway. Persons B through Z say “nah, it’s okay, I’ll do it instead,” with the responsibility for doing the thing basically going around in a circle. When it gets back to person A, also says “nah, I’ll do it”, then everyone else yells “BY ALL MEANS!!”. I’ve substituted this for another, more Western gag.

Chapter 94: I thought I was doing great, but I know I can do better

No waaaay. Mother, no waaaay! Is there a single living thing that could bring that behemoth down? Surely anyone that felled such a beast would be remembered as a mighty hero.

Maaaan, I thought I was doing great, but this was a pretty huge reminder that I can be doing better, even though “better” in this case is so far above me that I can’t even begin to imagine how to get there. This random encounter with my mother must have been a sign from the heavens: don’t get carried away. Yep.

Honestly, the way I am now, there’s not a single possible way for me to oppose creatures like my mother or an Earth Dragon. Meeting them definitely starts my death timer. Forget fighting them, even running the heck away is practically out of the question.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Detection (LV 9)] has been raised to level 10.”

Eh? Really? Mister Detection’s hit his cap already? ...Huh? But he’s not deriving or evolving? Huhhhh... This is actually kind of underwhelming, isn’t it? I worked soooo hard to finally get Detection working, you know. Sure, I’ve gotten an astoundingly great return on my investment, but I’m *greedy*. I want something mooooore! Even though it’s impossible for me to fight Mother, I at least want to get strong enough to make running away even a little bit possible! Hey, “Voice of Heaven”, is this really all I’m going to get?

“fzzt...,ffzssshhh....., ...zzh...”

Hm? What was that? ...Am I hearing things?

Wellll, that was a long shot anyway, nothing to be done about it. Although, “getting stronger” really is the simplest and most obvious solution to this problem. If I keep getting

stronger (without getting too full of myself), then I can probably get to the point where I can actually escape from crazy out-of-the-ordinary foes like that.

So, if that's what I'm going with, then it's time to focus on actually getting stronger. Step one: level up. From now on, I'm going to actively hunt out monsters for XP. So far, since evolving, I've killed two seahorses. Since Pride gives me a bonus to my experience gain, I should be pretty close to leveling up right now. Evolving resets my level, so it only makes sense that the experience required to level up gets reset as well, at least to a certain degree.

If I compare the effort it takes to go from level nine to ten before evolving, and one to two after, the latter is definitely a lot faster. However, if I compare a pre-evolution grind from level one to two to a post-evolution one, then it's actually noticeably slower post-evolution. So, it seems to me that the experience requirements do indeed get reset, but not quite all the way.

Based on what I've experienced so far, my next level-up is probably going to happen after I kill one more monster. Heck, I wouldn't have thought it was strange if I leveled up after killing that second seahorse. If I kill something as strong as a catfish, I bet I'd go up two levels at once. So, let's put hunting at the top of my list.

Step two: skills. I've been working on grinding a bunch of those out as I've been moving around. My focus so far has been on Appraisal and Detection, though I've also been working on Foresight and Accelerated Thought. Detection's maxed out now, but I've still got a lot of its support skills to level. So, until I can max all of those out, I'm going to keep Detection running constantly as I go.

While that's happening, I should start focusing on some of the other skills that I can grind while moving. The safest of those are probably my sensory-boosting skills. If I keep doing things like concentrating on spotting things in the distance or sniffing around for any strange scents as I walk, they'll probably level up pretty easily. They're pretty high already, so it shouldn't be too long before they're maxed out. Let's go with that, then.

Then, there's one more thing. This isn't something that I can work on while moving, so I need to find a place that I can safely stop and seriously practice it. I'm talking, of course, about Mana Manipulation.

If you think about it, it's possible to pick up skills without spending skill points if you accumulate enough proficiency. Since that's the case, I should save my skill points for things that I can't easily acquire with proficiency, like those evil eye skills, and spend some time on trying to figure out how to gain proficiency with other skills, like Mana Manipulation.

Thanks to Detection, using Mana Perception isn't a problem at all. If I concentrate, I can feel the flow of mana as it drifts through the air. If I can somehow figure out how to manipulate that mana, or maybe even just force it to move somewhere, then I should be able to start accumulating experience, getting me Mana Manipulation without having to spend a single skill point on it... probably. If I can just get that skill, then I can start practicing magic as much as I want.

However, let's not forget my original goal here: to climb the heck up out of the middle strata. Taking the time to grind out things that I can't do while moving will only slow me down, so I'm not going to do anything that specifically requires me to stop. Thus, I will keep moving, until the bitter end. These middle strata aren't any place for me to settle down. I can't lose sight of that.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Accelerated Thought (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Foresight (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

Alright! Thanks to my Lord of Pride title, my mental skills level up very quickly. I'm going to keep pounding away at these.

Lord of Patience has a similar effect, letting me boost my defensive skills more quickly, but those aren't really the kinds of things I can voluntarily work on leveling. If I really wanted to mutilate myself, I could use Poison Synthesis to level Greater Poison Resistance and

Paralysis Resistance, and then use All-Purpose Silk to level my Slashing, Bashing, Damage, Decay, and maybe even Ballistic resistances. That would do a good enough job at leveling those skills, but that's the kind of thing that I'd need a long-term base of operations for. Not only is my regeneration way slower here in the middle strata, but I don't have any real place for me to get as much rest as I think I'd need.

Leveling my stat-boosting skills is something that I really want to get done sooner rather than later, but that's also something that really requires settling down first. It would be great if it leveled a bunch while I was in combat, but if I really want any more progress than that I'd really have to do some focused strength training. When I actually have some spare time and energy, I think I'll work on that a little bit.

For now, I guess I'll stick with the plan of grinding up my skills, especially my sensory-boosting skills, while I'm moving forward. I'm especially interested in Enhanced Vision, since it's already at level nine, so I think I'm going to focus on that.

Chapter 95: Superior species

Shortly after I decided that I was going to get stronger, I finally found another monster.

Elro Devgyard – LV 4

Statistics:

HP: 103/103 (green)

MP: 41/41 (blue)

SP: 76/76 (yellow), 69/69 (red)

Avg. Offense: 56

Avg. Defense: 48

Avg. Magic Power: 21

Avg. Resistance: 18

Avg. Speed: 41

Skills:

[Swimming (LV 2)] • [Heat Nullification]

This thing is really strange, like a sphere with four legs sticking out of it. I think I'm going to call it a pillbug, but this thing... it's even more of a small fry than the seahorses are. The only reason that fighting them is even remotely difficult is that they sprint for the safety of the magma as soon as they sense danger, which means I need to make sure I quickly bring them down while they're still on land.

This one's on solid ground right now, so I either have to kill it in one strike or paralyze it so that it can't run away. I think I'll use my Deadly Spider Venom, and kill two bugs with one stone.

I leap out from the shadow of a rock, swiftly closing in on my prey. Before it even has a chance to notice my existence, I've activated Poison Synthesis. I have no idea where the mouth on a pillbug could possibly be, so I just splash it everywhere.

In an instant, its health disappears completely. So fast!! ...So weak!!

“Experience requirements met. Zoa Ere, you have grown from level 1 to level 2. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Slashing Enhancement (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3 and your skill [SP Consumption Reduction (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4. You have acquired additional skill points.”

W, well, just as planned, I got my level-up. No problems here, nuh uh. I was just a little surprised by how weak it was.

While I take a moment to settle myself, I check my new stats.

Zoa Ere – LV 2 – (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 215/215 (green) **(20 up)**

MP: 311/311 (blue) **(20 up)**

SP: 215/215 (yellow) **(20 up)**, 215/215 (red) +399 **(20 up)**

Avg. Offense: 269 **(18 up)**

Avg. Defense: 369 **(18 up)**

Avg. Magic Power: 255 **(10 up)**

Avg. Resistance: 390 **(10 up)**

Avg. Speed: 1342 **(70 up)**

Skills:

[Automatic HP Recovery (LV 6)] • [Accelerated MP Recovery (LV 4)] •
[MP Consumption Reduction (LV 3)] • [Accelerated SP Recovery (LV 3)] •
[SP Consumption Reduction (LV 4)] • [Damage Enhancement (LV 2)] •
[Slashing Enhancement (LV 3)] • [Poison Enhancement (LV 4)] • [Battle Spirit (LV 2)] •
[Willpower Allocation (LV 2)] • [Greater Poison Attack (LV 3)] • [Decaying Attack (LV 1)] •
[Poison Synthesis (LV 8)] • [Thread Talent (LV 3)] • [All-Purpose Silk (LV 1)] •

[Thread Manipulation (LV 8)] • [Throwing (LV 7)] • [3-D Maneuvering (LV 5)] • [Concentration (LV 10)] • [Accelerated Thought (LV 4)] • [Foresight (LV 4)] • [Multitasking (LV 9)] • [Rapid Computation (LV 1)] • [Aiming (LV 8)] • [Evasion (LV 7)] • [Appraisal (LV 9)] • [Detection (LV 10)] • [Stealth (LV 8)] • [Silence (LV 2)] • [Conviction] • [Hell] • [Corruption Magic (LV 3)] • [Shadow Magic (LV 3)] • [Poison Magic (LV 3)] • [Abyssal Magic (LV 10)] • [Patience] • [Pride] • [Overeating (LV 9)] • [Night Vision (LV 10)] • [Visible Spectrum Expansion (LV 2)] • [Damage Resistance (LV 2)] • [Bashing Resistance (LV 2)] • [Slashing Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fire Resistance (LV 2)] • [Greater Poison Resistance (LV 2)] • [Paralysis Resistance (LV 4)] • [Petrification Resistance (LV 3)] • [Acid Resistance (LV 4)] • [Decay Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fainting Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fear Resistance (LV 8)] • [Corruption Immunity] • [Ignore Pain] • [Pain Tolerance (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Vision (LV 9)] • [Enhanced Hearing (LV 8)] • [Enhanced Smell (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Taste (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Touch (LV 7)] • [Divine Domain Expansion (LV 2)] • [Vitality (LV 9)] • [Mana Pool (LV 8)] • [Alacrity (LV 9)] • [Endurance (LV 9)] • [Greater Strength (LV 4)] • [Greater Toughness (LV 4)] • [Resistance (LV 4)] • [Kartikeya (LV 3)] • [Taboo (LV 7)] • [n % I = W]

Skill points available: 50

Titles:

[Filth Eater] • [Kin Eater] • [Assassin] • [Monster Slayer] • [Poison User] • [Silk User] • [Merciless] • [Monster Slaughterer] • [Lord of Pride] • [Lord of Patience]

Hm? Hmm? What's this? My stats, they're significantly higher, aren't they? Before now, if we ignore Pride's effects, I was getting, well, one point in everything as I leveled. I'm getting *waaaay* more now! Whoa, did the amount of stat gain maybe change when I evolved?

O... oh!! That's just what I'd expect from a species that they say has high combat potential! I never would have thought that evolving would change my stat gains. This owns. This seriously owns.

On top of that, I got *fifty* skill points! Before now I was just getting twenty, but I just got two and a half times that many! I might be able to pick up an Evil Eye skill next level, huh! Ahaha! This is way good. Waaaay good.

If things keep going like this, I'm not going to need to stop and seriously try to train proficiency in Mana Manipulation. Aaaah, no, wait, if I can do it on my own, then it's probably best for me to actually try to do so. I don't actually know if an Evil Eye is going to cost me more than 100 skill points, after all. I'm getting too optimistic here.

Yeah, I can't afford to get worked up here. I've never, ever gotten anything good out of letting myself get too excited about something.

Although, looking here at the display again, it seems like my stat gains were actually pretty balanced and stable across the board. I'm still massively specialized in speed, but thanks to Patience my Defense and Resistance stats went up a bunch as well. My attack stat is starting to look a little low in comparison, but in reality I back up my physical attacks with poison, so even this is pretty high. Since I'm still so good at evading, it's unlikely that I'll ever get hit by an attack, but if I do, now I've got some extra defense to keep me safe. I'm out of the one-hit-instant-death danger zone!

Huh? If you list everything out like that, it makes me sound like the strongest monster down here, right? ...Wait, no, no, I must not let myself get worked up. I need to go forth with a humble heart.

Author's note: I've added numbers to show stat increases. What do you think?

Side Story 14: Academy Life

My time at the Academy so far has been alright. Most of the stuff we're covering in our classes is stuff that I know, but I make myself sit through it so that I can review the material. When I get so bored that I can't stand it, I work on leveling whatever skills I can practice without letting anyone see.

If you just look at my classes, things look calm and peaceful, but I actually am having quite a few problems on the human relations front.

The first problem is the teachers. They essentially treat me one of three ways: they either go out of their way to suck up to me, they distance themselves from me to avoid being influenced, or they try to tangle themselves in my life as much as they can. It could be because I'm royalty, but I think it's really because my ability scores already vastly exceed those of my teachers.

I don't really have much political influence, but I can't just outright avoid the teachers that try to suck up to me lest I offend them. If I let them get too entangled, though, then it starts getting really annoying. I really do prefer the teachers that just interact with me normally, but those are few and far between.

The next problem is the students. They can be divided into three categories, too: the toadies that suck up to me, the students that surround me at a distance, and those that are arbitrarily hostile towards me. There's nobody who wants to treat me normally, so at the end of the day I'm usually only left with Sue and Katia. Hasebe joins us too, so the four of us wind up hanging out a lot.

Katia is usually able to drive the toadies away. Since I can usually only put on a forced smile and let those kinds of people follow my around, I'm very grateful to have a friend that can unhesitatingly cut them down for me.

As for the ones that always follow me at a distance, they can be divided into a few more types. There's those that look at me with constant yearning, those who keep looking at me

coolly to show how unaffected they are, those who want to jump in and make my acquaintance but haven't found the right opportunity yet, and so on, and so on.

The most problematic group are those students that are arbitrarily hostile towards me. These people are almost always either the nobles or high-ranking aristocrats from other nations. Occasionally, it's one of the commoners that was suddenly dragged up into this world.

If there's one thing they have in common, it's their conceitedness. Many of them either have high station or high skill, and they see me as an eyesore for having even greater station and skill than they.

Sometimes, I'd get challenged to duels. If I were to duel a person from another country, it would be an international incident, so I naturally turned down every request. When I did that, though, they started spreading rumors that the genius prince is a coward who wouldn't fight any duels.

Give me a break.

However, these are *children* that we're talking about. If you add up the time I spent in my previous and current lives, I'm already an adult by now, so I can just smile and shrug it all off. Sue, however, always goes berserk, and I'm the one who gets stuck with holding her back when she tries to purge my opponents.

She's been behaving somewhat strangely, lately. It feels like she has something important to ask me, but she just can't make it come out. I have some kind of idea about what she wants to ask, though. Well, more accurately, Katia told me.

"Hey, about Sue... she wants to know about our relationship."

"Huh? Our relationship?"

"I mean, she wants to know about how we're connected, like from our previous life. She started to guess that something was up after we met with Miss Okazaki and she saw how we interacted with her."

"Ahh... come to think of it, we do actually talk in Japanese a lot in front of her, don't we."

“Exactly. If your older brother, who you’ve known for both of your entire lives, suddenly meets with a person you’ve never seen before and starts talking in a foreign language you’ve never heard before, you’d totally think that was weird.”

“Yeah, you’re right... whoops.”

“Well, when she finally asks you about it, it’s up to you if you’re going to tell her the truth or not.”

“Huh? I shouldn’t, right?”

“It’s your decision, man. Whether you’re going to keep lying to her about what’s happening or tell her the truth, make up your mind quickly and get it over with. It’s unfair to Sue otherwise, you know?”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

So, it seems like she’s been trying to ask me about my relationship with the others. To be honest, though, I can’t really make up my mind. How do I even explain this to her? “You thought I was your older brother, but this entire time I’ve really been just some strange guy you’ve never met who reincarnated into your older brother’s body.” I’m terrified that she’s going to hate me if I say that to her.

All this time, I’ve tried to love her like my own little sister. But, how does Sue look at me? I know that she’s really attached to me, but if she knew that the older brother she had been clinging to was some other stranger, what would she think? I grew up here with all of the memories and experiences from my previous life. If you compare me to Sue, who has kept up with me this entire time, I’ve been really dishonest. Is she going to look at me with scorn when she realizes that? I don’t think Sue would ever scorn me, but even just imagining what that would be like is awful.

If that’s the case, then you’d think that I should lie to her, but even that seems insincere to me. If my real little sister came to me like that, having such trouble asking what she wanted to, there’s no way I’d just carelessly dodge around her questions. If I’m going to lie to her, I’m going to have to commit to lying to her for my entire life.

I still have no idea what I should actually do. However, if Sue does finally ask me about it, I need to give a serious answer. If Katia hadn’t warned me in advance, I’d probably just

dance around the question without thinking too deeply about it. I'm very glad that she advised me about this in advance.

So, it's plain to see that human relations aren't very good for me here at school, whether they're between my friends or between the other students here. On top of all that, though, the other three reincarnated people have me at wits' end.

Miss Okazaki is, as always, an enigma. For a while, we didn't see her anywhere, not even for class, so I thought she might have gone somewhere. Suddenly, though, without warning, she started showing up again like nothing had ever been the matter. I had lots of questions for her the next time we met, but she gave nothing but lazy, noncommittal answers. When I started specifically asking about what happened to Kyouya, it felt like she started evading even harder.

Kyouya was a very close friend of Katia's and mine back in our previous lives. However, Miss Okazaki isn't telling us anything about where he might be now. I somehow managed to piece together a few details, though, and it seems like Kyouya might not actually be under the elves' protection. Even though I was very curious about where he was or even how he was doing, Miss Okazaki just kept blithely evading every question I threw at her.

Hasebe is also quite a bit of a problem. Her name here in this world is Yulene Ulen. Her last name is the name of the church she was raised in, instead of an orphanage. Hasebe—no, Yulie—was raised as an orphan. There seem to be a lot of orphans in this world. In Japan, there were quite a few of them, but in this harsh world where civilization has yet to develop quite as far, there are far more.

I'm not saying that this is a good thing at all, but what usually happens is that the orphans who are raised by the church wind up staying with the church once they're old enough to understand what's happening to them. Yulie, though, is different. From birth, she not only possessed all of her memories from the previous world, but also her sense of self.

The first thing I realized after having been reborn was that I was suddenly a baby. This was an enormous shock, although I'm just speaking from my own experience. I was

disoriented, confused, and above all extremely anxious. What happened to me? Did I die? What happened to me back then?

For me, my worries were without end, but I they can't even compare to what Yulie must have felt after being thrown into that same situation. It seems like her own shock was far greater than my own. Honestly, I can't possibly imagine what Yulie must have been feeling at that time.

In the middle of her absolute anxiety, there was something she could cling to: the teachings of the Words of God. This is the religion of the church who found and raised her, and is also a religion that's practiced widely across human lands. Their teachings, if I had to summarize them in one sentence, say that one must constantly strive to raise one's skills so that one may hear the Words of God.

The Words of God. I honestly can't understand whatever this is. It seems like it's in reference to the game-like system messages you hear when you level something up. Everyone in this world, though, thinks that hearing this voice is completely and utterly natural. The only people in this world who could possibly find it strange are those of us who were reincarnated into this world. To everyone else, it's a part of life, just like skills and stats are. That's just how this world is.

The churches of the Words of God preach that the system message voice is really the voice of a god, and one of the highest tenets of this religion is that everyone should try their hardest to raise their skills and levels as much as possible so that they can hear that divine voice more often. As for me, I can't help but wonder what the hell is up with this nonsensical doctrine, but that doesn't change the fact that it's commonly accepted in this world.

Yulie, like many other people in this world, has been completely immersed in this religion, though I would have thought she'd have the same thoughts about it as me.

"Shun, you've leveled your skills so much! I think that's really amazing. You should keep raising your skills steadily like that, so you can hear even more of the words of God."

"Shun, you haven't raised your own level at all? That's not good at all! When you raise your level, God says many things to you at once, you know? You need to work on leveling up so that you can hear God's voice."

"Shun, you have Appraisal, right? If you ever see someone with a skill named "Taboo", I want you to tell me about it right away. I can't possibly let anyone who has leveled a skill the gods themselves have declared to be taboo survive long enough to do any damage."

"Shun, you got a new rank in a skill, so you must have heard the words of God again! Aaahhh, the voice of God was heard once again. Today, I can truly be happy."

I pulled away from her. She was just acting so strangely that I couldn't stay too close. After all, her eyes always got muddy and unfocused whenever she started raving about the gods. There was no way I could hang out with someone like that.

Yulie, however, never seemed like she should have turned out like this. Somewhere deep within her is a perfectly ordinary high school girl. It must have been her environment that shaped her into who she is today. The constant dread from being reincarnated. The despair from having been abandoned by her parents. The anxiousness from having to live in this completely unfamiliar world.

Then, in the midst of all that, she would have heard a system message, speaking in familiar, nostalgic Japanese. It's really easy to see how that could have become her emotional support. On top of that, she was surrounded by people who worshiped that same voice. Yulie had been someone who would go with the flow of things, so it might have been almost inevitable that she'd get caught up in that religion. I wonder if, after getting swept up, she used the maximum benefits of having been reincarnated to become a Saint candidate.

Finally, the last person on the list is the biggest of my problems. Natsume, now known as Hugo, seems to be my enemy. Not like the others, either. The petty jealousy of the other children cannot compare to the raw hostility that Hugo shows me. When he looks at me, you can see an undercurrent of raw killing intent churning within his gaze.

I have no idea what could have possibly caused him to be so hostile towards me. Regardless of whether I know it or not, at this rate I know that something is bound to happen. Before long, he is going to do *something*. That's what I fear.

Chapter 96. I think, therefore I am; I move, therefore I am; I am, and I am the I who I am, therefore I am

Some time has passed since I leveled up. I've been focusing a lot on straining my vision as far as it can possibly go, but I just can't push Enhanced Vision past level nine. I guess it really is hard to get a skill past level nine, after all. The rest of my skills are doing great, though!

First off, Silence is now level three. You did it, little spider, you're even sneakier!

Next, Accelerated Thought and Foresight have both hit level five. You did it, little spider, you're even dodgier!

Fire Resistance has, at long, long last, gone up another level to level three. Thanks to Patience, I know I should be getting resistance skills more quickly, but even so this still feels like it's taking forever. *Man*, I'm weak to fire. Even after I changed species, I'm still weak to fire, huh? I wonder if any of my other weaknesses changed at all, though... I can't really test any of them out right now, though, so I can't really say anything else about it.

Well, my old defense stat was garbage anyway, so even if my resistances have changed it's not like they could have gotten any woooorse... Although, since my defense stat has finally started to go up, maybe I really should be worried about my resistances. There might be some other attribute that I'm weak against. I don't have any good ways to test it, though...

So, next is Multitasking. That hit level ten, then evolved into a new skill: Multiple Wills. Now *this* is interesting. Just like the name implies, the number of consciousnesses in my brain has actually increased. With Multitasking, even though I could focus on more than one task at once, it was all being juggled by the same consciousness. Multiple Wills, though, splits my entire brain in two. It's something like having a split personality. Both personalities, though, are me; I'm just able to have two entirely different trains of thought going at the same time now. On top of that, both consciousnesses have the full benefit of

Multitasking, so it's like my cognitive abilities have just straight-up doubled. *Super* convenient. I'm betting that leveling this up will give me even more consciousnesses.

However, only one consciousness can actually move my body. Since that's the case, I'm using one consciousness to move my body, and the other to handle processing information from Appraisal and Detection. So, I'm counting on you, Captain Body! Leave it to me, Captain Brain! ...It's possible now for me to have conversations with myself like this. Since both personalities are still me, though, we already share information perfectly.

There's no main or sub-personality here. Both are me. I am me, for me, by me! ...Yep, I've lost me entirely. Like, if I start asking these kinds of questions, then the definition of what counts as a person's sense of self starts to get pretty blurry. Maybe the distinction is just lost on me, since I can't even decide which personality is the main one. Maybe, indeed... Speaking of which, maybe I'm actually kind of special for being able to master this skill and use it so normally? Probably not, though.

While Captain Brain was contemplating philosophy, Captain Body defeated a monster. Good job, me! Oh, no, you flatter me.

This time, I tried using my new Decaying Attack, but there's no waaaay I can actually use it. Well, no, that's not to say that it isn't amazing. It's actually *massively* powerful. It's only level one, and it's still somehow this amazing. Too amazing, in fact.

Because, y'know, it turned that monster into compost with a single hit, right?

That's strange, right? Was that was "decay" meant, all this time? Rotting? Decomposing? This amount of decay is way more powerful than just rotting, though. This is death's unstoppable advance, baked into an attribute. It's terrifying! Even at level one, it's massively overkill. What the heck is going to happen when I level it up?

That said, I *did* mention that there's no way I'd be able to use it. There's two reasons for that. First off, there's not much of a corpse left after the fact, which means that there's nothing left for me to eat. Using this to farm experience points would be absolutely

amazing, but if I do that I'm only getting half of what I really wanted out of my monster hunting down here. I can't stomach that. Literally and figuratively, can't stomach that.

The other problem, though, is waaaay worse: when I use it, I take damage too.

Take a look at the sickle I used for my test. The edge of it is all tattered and worn-out. I lost health, too! Isn't this attack suicidal?! So, even though it's hugely powerful, there's a huge amount of backlash, too. In a tense, heated battle where I'm forced to fight with my fullest strength I might use it as a last resort, but apart from that I'm not going to touch it. Certainly not for cleaning up these small fry. *Especially* not here in the middle strata, where my passive health recovery is so slow.

Aaaargh, when is this sickle going to get fixed?! I think I'm going to level up soon, so it'll fix itself when that happens, but until then I'm going to be down a sickle for my next fights. Ah well, I've been using Poison Synthesis a lot more than my sickles, so it's not going to make a whole lot of difference unless I wind up fighting another eel, or maybe some other powerful foe.

In the first place, I only just started fighting with my sickles recently. My main weapon in these middle strata is still Poison Synthesis. After all, monsters start taking damage the instant they come into contact with it. If I were using my sickles more, I'd be getting a bunch of proficiency towards Slashing Attack, but doing that puts me in a perfect position to take a bunch of damage.

Plus, if I slash something open, then all of its guts fall out onto the ground, making everything harder to eat.

Well then, Captain Body: find some more prey! Roger that, Captain Brain, seeking targets now.

Maaaan, Multiple Wills really is ludicrously convenient. If I manage to get myself a second body, I can finally make Shadow Clones¹, right? Ah, but if I do that, they're both going to be my real body, so if either of them gets hit it's going to be painful. Aaaah, that would suuuuck... I mean, I'd still survive if one of my two bodies was slain, but that still means

I'd experience something very much like dying, right? Yeaaaah. I do nooooot want to find out what that feels like. I've technically experienced dying once already, but I have no memory of that at all so it doesn't count.

Captain Body, you heard all that, right? Please try extra hard not to die, okay? Whoa, whoa, Captain Brain, you totally didn't need to remind me at all.

Yaaaaah.

Translator's notes from this chapter:

1. *A technique used in the manga Naruto, where the user creates physical duplicates of themselves.*

Chapter 97: The Eight-Eyed One

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Enhanced Vision (LV 9)] has been raised to level 10. Your [Enhanced Vision] skill has reached its maximum level, and a new skill, [Telescopic Sight (LV 1)] has been unlocked.“

Woohoo! Finally, Enhanced Vision hit its level cap. It looks like my reward for that is a derived skill, huh? Let’s not waste any time checking this out. Lady Appraisal?

Telescopic Sight: *Allows the user to visually magnify distant images.*

Aaaah, it does exactly what it saaaays... Hmmmm. I dunno about this. My sensory-boosting skills are all plain, straightforward bonuses, and this derived skill is also pretty boring. I guess for now we should try testing this out...

Captain Body, activate Telescopic Sight!

Request acknowledged, Captain Brain!

Oh? Ohh?! OOHHHH?! Oh man, this is awesome! I’m sorry I called you boring!

Simultaneously overlaid on each other, I see both the images from my original field of view and the magnified image of Telescopic Sight. I was thinking that this was going to zoom in my entire field of vision at once, but it looks like I can activate it with one eye at a time. Ordinarily, having these two different fields of vision active simultaneously seems like it would be unusably chaotic, but, hey, there’s two of me! Split the work up, and it’s no problem at all.

Right now, my skill level is pretty low, so the magnification level I’m getting is pretty low and the effective range is pretty short, but once I start leveling this up it’s going to start being super useful. For example, if Detection alerts me to a nearby enemy, I can use Telescopic Sight to keep an eye on it at a distance while still being able to see everything else normally. Yeah, yeah! And just like all of my other passive skills, this isn’t consuming

any mana at all. I can think of a lot of uses for this skill, so I'm going to add this to the list of skills I always keep activated in the background for leveling purposes.

It's not good to get too excited, though, Captain Brain.

What's up, Captain Body?

I've been looking around with Telescopic Sight, and I found an enemy off in the distance.

Oh! I just got it, and it's already so useful!

Shall I go kill it immediately?

That goes without saying!

Aye-aye, sir!

Just like that, I sneakily creep up to my target. My sickle is still too damaged to use after that Decaying Attack suicide strike, so I use Poison Synthesis and dump some Deadly Spider Venom on my target. In a heartbeat, all of its health evaporates. As always, this is a great and terrible power.

“Experience requirements met. Zoa Ere, you have grown from level 2 to level 3. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Visible Spectrum Expansion (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3 and your skill [Vitality (LV 9)] has been raised to level 10. Your [Vitality] skill has reached its maximum level and has evolved into a new skill, [Greater Vitality (LV 1)]. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Oh, perfect timing on that level up! Molting repaired my sickle. On top of that, one of my stat-boosting skills evolved, huh! Let's Appraise it real quick.

Greater Vitality: Increases HP based on ten times the skill level. In addition, when leveling up, provides an additional increase to HP based on the skill level.

Just like I thought, it's basically the same thing as Greater Strength. So that means that evolving the rest of my stat-boosting skills is going to give me that bonus stat increase when I level, right? I really want to crank those out as quickly as I can, but I really am going to need to be patient and wait until I get out of the middle strata first... I really want to get someplace safe, and fast.

Also, I've been waiting for this! With this level-up, I finally have a hundred skill points! Yay! Now then, have these rumored Evil Eye-type skills made their appearance?!

Evil Eye of Curses (100): *Applies Curse-attributed damage to things within the user's field of view.*

Evil Eye of Destruction (100): *Applies Decay-attributed damage to things within the user's field of view.*

Evil Eye of Paralysis (100): *Applies Paralysis-attributed damage to things within the user's field of view.*

Evil Eye of Petrification (100): *Applies Petrification-attributed damage to things within the user's field of view.*

Evil Eye of Disquiet (100): *Applies the Corruption Magic spell "Disquiet" to things within the user's field of view.*

Evil Eye of Phantom Pain (100): *Applies the Corruption Magic spell "Phantom Pain" to things within the user's field of view.*

Evil Eye of Madness (100): *Applies the Corruption Magic spell "Madness" to things within the user's field of view.*

Evil Eye of Fascination (100): *Applies the Corruption Magic spell "Fascination" to things within the user's field of view.*

Evil Eye of Hypnotism (100): *Applies the Corruption Magic spell "Hypnotism" to things within the user's field of view.*

Evil Eye of Dread (100): *Applies the Corruption Magic spell "Dread" to things within the user's field of view.*

Whoa. They really did appear. These skills definitely weren't in the list before now. And there's so many of them, too, but I have to only pick one! How do I decide?

Captain Brain, a moment?

What is it, Captain Body?

Can't we pick more than just one?

Eh? How would we do that?

You do know that we have eight eyes, right?

Right, and...?

So, that means that we can have eight Evil Eyes at once, right?

...?! I'm a genius!!

Heh heh heh. That is correct: I am indeed a genius!

Seriously, I'm a genius! And, since I'm a genius, that means that everything I do is perfect!

That's right! Having eight simultaneous Evil Eyes going is going to be amazing, right?

Oh maaaan. Seriously, oh maaaan. My dreams are getting waaaay too big right now!

If we're using one eye for Telescopic Sight, that only leaves seven free, though.

And if we want to keep a normal field of view, then that means we're down to six, huh?

You're right. This time we're picking one, and we'll get five more as we save up the skill points. Sound good?

Sounds perfect. So, Captain Body, which Evil Eye do you think is the best?

I think we should pick the Curse one, since we don't have access to that attribute yet. Let's hold off on the corruption-based ones, they seem like they'd be better used against people instead of monsters.

Yeah, I agree... though do I really prefer the Curse one? In the upper strata we did fight that petrification lizard, but making a Petrification eye effective might take a while...

Yeah, but once we get it up high enough, it'll be really strong. I still think we should play it safe, though, and get the Curse one.

Just what I'd expect from me, you really have your stuff together.

I know, right?

So, without further ado, let's pick up the Evil Eye of Curses.

Curse: *Weakens all of the recipient's ability scores while damaging their HP, MP, and SP.*

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. The title is in reference to "The Three-Eyed One", an Osamu Tezuka manga.

Chapter 98: Look into my eyes!!

I just got the Evil Eye of Curses at level one~! Hooray~! I finally managed to get it, but if I want to know what this actually does, I'm going to need to look around here for a monster I can use as a proper lab rat. So, then, let's dig through Detection's data and try to find something that might work.

Hmm. Hmm... It looks like there might be something over there, huh... It's just barely on the edge of my range, so I can't get much data about it, but it looks like it's something up on solid ground. That's perfect! So nice of it to volunteer.

Elro Geafrog – LV 4

Statistics:

HP: 85/85 (green)

MP: 75/75 (blue)

SP: 68/68 (yellow), 68/68 (red)

Avg. Offense: 67

Avg. Defense: 59

Avg. Magic Power: 46

Avg. Resistance: 46

Avg. Speed: 43

Skills:

[Poison Synthesis (LV 3)] • [Acid Attack (LV 3)] • [Shooting (LV 4)] • [Swimming (LV 2)] • [Night Vision (LV 7)] • [Poison Resistance (LV 2)] • [Acid Resistance (LV 2)] • [Heat Nullification]

Ah, it's the frog's evolved form. At least, it certainly does look like the evolved form of those frogs I fought so long ago. How nostalgic! It doesn't really seem like it's gotten much stronger, but I think it looks like it's evolved somewhat to match its environment. It's got Heat Nullification, after all.

Also, it has levels in Night Vision despite the fact that it's living in an area brightly lit by magma, which makes me think that it's evolved from something that came from the upper strata. The upper and lower strata are pitch black, after all. If something from the upper strata got lost and found itself down here in the middle strata, it would be basically mandatory for it to evolve to fit this climate. If something from the lower strata came up here... well, I'd rather that didn't happen. The thought of a monster from the lower strata somehow evolving to adapt itself to the middle strata is waaaay too dreadful.

Now that I'm looking at this frog's spit attack, though, it looks like what I thought was a spit attack might have actually been the same Poison Synthesis skill that I use, launched with that Shooting skill. Maaaan, that there's a good skill. I want it too. If I did, I'd have a poison bullet that that frog's acid wouldn't even hold a candle to. I wonder if I can grind out skill proficiency by firing silk out of my butt as hard as I can...?

While Captain Brain ponders that kind of useless garbage, *I* get to work. Step one: synthesize Weak Poison with every single damage slider at its minimum, plus the paralysis attribute. This frog has a couple levels of Poison Resistance, so I don't think this will be enough to kill it. I sneak up close behind the frog and synthesize my poison. Alright, the frog's ready for experimentation!

Ah, Captain Body, good job! Now I can experiment on this thing to my heart's content. Now then: Evil Eye, Activate!

Alright, turning that on was no problem at all. Now, what does this look like?

Oh... oh. The frog's health, mana, and stamina are all slowly, slowly decreasing. I guess it is level one, after all, so the rate of damage it can put out is going to be pretty slow. Both the frog's yellow and red stamina gauges are emptying out, but since the yellow bar recovers pretty quickly this isn't really doing much of anything. If I level it up, then the damage will be high enough that it'll start outpacing regeneration, right? If that's the case, then I'll be able to make someone short of breath with a glare, huh... That's pretty heartless. Ah! Except, they'll probably run out of health and die first. It looks like I'm damaging health and stamina at about the same rates, after all...

Oh! Its *stats* are going down too! There's little numbers next to each stat showing how many points each one's been decreased by. Next to that, there's another number in parentheses showing me what those values are usually like at their maximum.

Oho! So, if I eat a status-debuffing attack, it'll be printed out like this, huh? I'll be able to notice that after I take a single hit. As expected of the lady Appraisal, she doesn't miss a single beat.

It looks like my Evil Eye isn't a passive skill like all of the other cool ones have been as of late. It's sucking away at my mana... although, it's not using very much of it at all. It's ticking down at a rate of maybe one point per ten seconds. The frog's taking one point of damage every five seconds, so maybe the conversion rate isn't really all that bad? If you think about how much mana I have right now, it looks like I can keep this up for over fifty minutes, so if I think about it like that then it looks like this isn't really that inefficient. Once I level it up, it'll probably start doing more damage, faster.

Ah! The frog's paralysis looks like it's wearing off... oh! Just as I started thinking that, Captain Body dropped some more paralytic poison on it. As is only natural for me: I can support myself lightning quick.

Hmmmm. The health and mana damage is pretty good, but the stat damage isn't really very good. At the start, the frog's stats went down at about the same rate that its health was getting depleted, but now that it's hit the halfway mark it's barely going down at all anymore. Huh, is there a limit to how much stats can be lowered? I mean, it kinda makes sense if you think about it. If it kept decreasing, then at some point the target's defense stat would hit zero. You can't even call that a paper-thin defense. That's basically just having a really feeble body.

However, dropping someone's stats by half is still a pretty huge deal. It doesn't really make a huge ton of a difference if I debuff a small fry like this frog, but if I can cut the stats of a strong monster like an eel down to half... Most of the monsters I've seen tend to rely far more on their stats than their skills, so weakening their stats is effectively a drastic

weakening of the monster itself. If I slash an eel's stats in half, then there wouldn't be much difference between it and a catfish anymore.

It looks like I've gained an anti-strong-monster trump card! I guess I've got to put a lot of effort into leveling this skill in the near future.

Hm? Uhh, what? The frog *died*?! Whaaaat? I thought it had plenty of health left, though...? Its health started dropping super quickly for some reason, but why? ...Ah! Before its health ran out, its red stamina gauge emptied out. Ahhhh, is that what that was... if your red stamina runs out, then you rapidly start losing your health. That's terrifying!

...Whoa. Evolving just started looking waaaay more dangerous. I'm so glad that I had plenty of food every time I did that. Man, I'm going to have to keep an eye on that, even if I think that Overeating is going to keep my stamina full for quite some time.

In any event, the Evil Eye of Curses seems to actually be pretty useful. Whenever I've got a bunch of excess mana, I should keep it running so that I can grind out some skill proficiency for it, right...? Yeah. I'm going to make sure that my mana pool is always at least half full, just in case anything happens, but I'm going to allocate the other half of it to working on grinding out my Evil Eye. This is a skill I can work on leveling while I'm on the move, too.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *The title COULD be a reference to Ghost Rider's quote in Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3 when he hits his level 3 super, Penance Stare.*

Chapter 99. That girl's an idiot, so I've got to be the responsible one

Translator's note: I'm changing it back to Captain.

I am a body. As yet, I have no name.¹

I'd like to take this moment to complain a little bit about Captain Brain.

That girl is an *idiot*.

Just now, she decided she wanted to try to work on learning the Shooting skill, so she was all "oh man let's fire a bunch of silk out of my butt!", but then when I tried it the silk got launched way, way farther than she thought it was going to. It landed in the magma. I nearly caught on fire! If I hadn't acted immediately to disconnect the rest of that strand from myself, then fire would have raced up the silk and set me ablaze.

So she keeps coming up with fundamentally useless proposals like that, and then when we try them out they wind up being, well, fundamentally useless. None of the experiments that she's been getting really excited about have ever been even remotely successful. Well, to be honest, I'm also always super excited to try these things out; they are my own ideas, after all. Really, couldn't she come up with anything a little bit more, well, normal?

If you bother thinking about any of these things for more than a second, it's pretty darn obvious that they're all worthless, you know? She's in charge of the brain! Shouldn't she be carefully thinking these through? She's an idiot, right? Yeah! She's an idiot!

So, as the unfortunate soul in charge of this body, it's my job to be the responsible one. After all, it's ultimately *my* actions that keep the delicate balance between life and death.

Captain Body, Captain Body!
What is it, Captain Brain?

Can we stick an Evil Eye on Telescopic Sight?

...?! Are you a genius?!

Oh hoh hoh. Yes! I am indeed a genius!

Whoa, seriously? I've been a genius this whole time! And since I'm a genius, that means everything I do is forgiven!

Of course, of course! If we funnel an Evil Eye through Telescopic Sight, that means we can use it at extremely long ranges, right? Isn't that amazing?

Oh yeah. Oh yaaaaah. That's seriously amazing. The possibilities are limitless!

So, let's get out there and find ourselves a target!

Yah-HA!

I am a brain. As of yet, I have no name.

Simultaneously activating Telescopic Sight and my Evil Eye is not going so well. Urgh. I guess if I could, it really would be OP as heck, so I guess I can't complain... Telescopic Sight has leveled all the way up to level five, thanks to constantly having it on. Compared to how it was at level one, I can not only see much farther with it, but the maximum magnification is also quite a bit better. If I were to be able to channel my Evil Eye through it, I'd have a really long-range attack at my disposal. What a shame.

Even so, this Evil Eye really is useful. I've been keeping it on whenever I have the spare mana for it, and by now it's hit level three. This one's slow as heck. However, blitzing my way through this middle strata is leaving me with a huge surplus of mana, so this is still great timing.

Another thing I noticed while I had Evil Eye up: for whatever reason, it doesn't actually change my field of view. I can't have it up at the same time as Telescopic Sight, but Enhanced Vision and the rest of my vision-boosting skills seem to fit into it just fine. Since I don't need to worry about restricting my field of view, it looks like I don't need to specifically reserve any of my other eyes to still be able to see.

This, of course, means that I can do what I only dreamed about doing: eight simultaneous Evil Eyes.

Also, it looks like I can't actually use any of my attribute attack skills to boost my Evil Eye. I tried tying my Greater Poison Attack skill into it, but it didn't seem to have any effect. What a pity. Well, I guess being able to do something like that would be just about as OP as being able to use Telescopic Sight for a long-ranged attack, so I guess it's only natural. If I were able to put my Deadly Spider Venom into my Evil Eye, then I'd be able to kill with a single glance of my deep blue mystic eyes that could perceive even death.² I already have eyes that can weaken and damage something just by glaring at it, though, which is plenty OP enough. Wishing for more is just greedy.

Next, I started wondering if it might be a great idea to try activating the Evil Eye of Curses in all eight of my eyes, and it looks like I actually can! It just doesn't actually have any extra effect. I kind of assumed that using eight eyes at once would give me eight times the power, but of course it isn't as simple as that.

However, I did discover that I can instead activate Telescopic Sight in more than one eye, which is extremely useful! Now I can pick out a bunch of different distant places to simultaneously magnify, which could be extremely useful depending on how I wound up using it.

So, allow me to change the subject for a bit. I need to tell you something about Captain Body.

That girl is an *idiot*.

A little while ago, I thought that I might be able to get the Shooting skill on my own by firing silk out of my butt as hard as I can. Captain Body then immediately said "oh maaaan, that's a great idea, I'm gonna try that right now!" and proceeded to launch a bunch of silk immediately.

Right at the magma.

Sure, she may have waved it away by saying “wow, that flew way further than I thought it would”, but even so I really would have preferred that she aimed it anywhere but the nearest magma patch. The silk all fell into the magma, of course, and immediately caught fire. The flame raced up the silk like a fuse, right towards my butt, which would have caught fire too (again!) if Captain Body hadn’t managed to cut it off at the very last second.

So I keep coming up with brilliant ideas like that, and she keeps managing to somehow take them in an entirely different direction. The wrong direction. Man, seriously, no matter how much of my genius I pour into these brilliant ideas, Captain Body manages to completely wreck them with her massive incompetence.

If you bother thinking about any of these things for more than a second, it’s pretty darn obvious that she’s going about them all wrong, you know? She’s in charge of the body! Did all that moving around make her into a stupid muscle-head? She’s an idiot, right? Yeah! She’s an idiot!

So, as the unfortunate soul in charge of this body, it’s my job to be the responsible one. After all, it’s ultimately *my* ideas that keep the delicate balance between life and death.

Captain Brain, Captain Brain!

What is it, Captain Body?

I was looking around with Telescopic Sight and I found a monster in the distance.

Seriously?! Wow, that’s way outside Detection’s range, even.

Heh heh heh. Why, Captain Brain, wouldn’t this mean that your reason for existence is that much less relevant?

Don’t get ahead of yourself, Captain Body. Did you think you could match my raw informational throughput? You’d need a hundred eyes to even come close!

Muahaha, go ahead, say that while you still can! Soon, you’ll see!

Heh. Soon? Never. But, fine! Try and struggle towards this lofty peak!

Heh heh heh.

Ahahaha.

So, what should we do?

Hunt that thing down, of course.

Aye aye, sir! You there, scoundrel! Prepare yourself!

Yah-HA!

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. This is a reference to the opening lines of “I Am a Cat”, a famous Japanese novel. This same reference was used in Chapter 3.
2. *This is a reference to the Mystic Eyes of Death Perception, an ability used by the protagonists of Tsukihime and Kara no Kyoukai.*

Chapter 100: Huh? Lady Appraisal is...?

Today is yet another day of wandering about the middle strata. Hmmmm. It's been a long freaking time since I first got here, but the end still isn't in sight. As expected of the world's greatest labyrinth. This is the kind of dungeon that you'd have to be willing to dedicate your whole life to exploring if you wanted to make it through, isn't it?

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 9)] has been raised to level 10.”

Oh? Ohhh?! OHHHHHHH?!?!

Finally. *FINALLY!* Appraisal has hit max level!! I'm ludicrously happy right now! The first skill I ever picked, my constant companion through fair and fowl, has *finally* reached its most perfect form!

Appraisal, who was good for nothing at all when I first met her, whose improvements were subtle, but steady, with each new level, who became more and more useful with each passing day, who was finally revealed as the talented Miss Appraisal, who tirelessly worked without complaint to better herself, who finally became a shining Lady that none could deny... Appraisal, you've finally, *finally!!*

Woooo! You've done a great job. You've done a fantastic job. I'm moved to tears! Thank you, Lady Appraisal! *Thank you!* Our future together will be bright!

But... there's no evolution, no evolved skill, huh... I mean, I guess that's fine. Appraisal hitting max level is still super huge. I really wanted some sort of awesome skill, though, something that would make me lord of all knowledge, ruler of all wisdom... But that's not going to happen, huh... I thought that if anyone could do it, Lady Appraisal could, but I guess that's not going to happen...

...Is it seriously not going to happen?

“fzzt...,fzzzzffsssshhh, ...zzsh, zhss...shaazh, zhasshh,”

...What the? What's that bad TV static sound?

“fzzsh, ...zzfrequest ackzzsshzt, zzt, fsstequires root administrative privilzzsshhtz,”

Uh? What the hell?!

“fsszxaat, zzshstrator Sariezzzsht....., ...zzat, tzzejected. Escalasszzvt...”

This seems kind of bad. I don't know what's bad about it, but this seems bad.

“Fzzt.....” BING!!

Compared to the unintelligible static that I was straining to hear, the crystal-clear ping that suddenly burst through my skull was so loud that I flinched, hard.

“Request acknowledged by root-level systems administrator D. Now constructing supplementary skill, [Wisdom]... ...Construction complete.”

“Requirements met have been met. You have gained the skill [Wisdom].” Your existing skills, [Appraisal (LV 10)] and [Detection (LV 10)], have been integrated with your new skill, [Wisdom].“

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Taboo (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8.”

“Requirements have been met. You have earned the title [Lord of Wisdom], and have been awarded the skills [Ultimate Magic] and [Celestial Power]. Your existing skills, [Accelerated MP Recovery (LV 4)] and [MP Consumption Reduction (LV 3)], have been integrated with your new skill, [Ultimate Magic]. Your existing skills, [Mana Pool (LV 9)] and [Resistance (LV 4)], have been integrated with your new skill, [Celestial Power].”

Huh?

Huh?!

HUUUUH?!

Wait, wait. This is weird. This is, of course, really, really weird, in a lot of different ways. What just happened? *Why* did it happen? What do I do now?!

I've got to calm down. Captain Body, deep, slow breaths, please.

Inhale, inhale, exhaaaaale...

Right. Let's tackle these in order.

First thing that happened was that I started hearing some largely-unintelligible noise. What was that? I have no clue. Usually when I hit something I have literally no clue about, I put it aside because there's no sense in wasting time worrying. This time, though, I don't really think I can get away with that. This is, after all, *really* obviously abnormal.

Abnormal? Yes, abnormal. Up until this point, I've just been kind of accepting that this world has skills and stats and so on, but in Japan those things just flat-out didn't exist. If I were in Japan right now, I'd be thinking that these skills were extremely freaking abnormal. I, however, just kind of brushed that under the rug, thinking "oh, this is just that kind of world", but was it really okay for me to take it so lightly?

Until now, it was. Now, however, things are a little bit different. The "Voice of Heaven" said something very peculiar.

"Request acknowledged by root-level systems administrator D. Now constructing supplementary skill, [Wisdom]... ...Construction complete."

Based on this, it looks like **someone is keeping me under observation**, and that **person heard my grumbling**, and then **they made a new skill for me**, right?

If that's the case, then the culprit is this so-called "root-level systems administrator D". On top of that, if you think about the fact that he's got "root-level" in his title, then there might be other, lower-ranking administrators, too.

So, these administrators, what the heck do they administer? That, at least, is obvious. Skills. That is the inevitable, undeniable conclusion of this train of thought. In other words: **the skills in this world are granted by these beings called "administrators".**

Why? How? Heck if I know. I can only say one thing for certain:

There's something weird about this world.

Chills are running down my nonexistent spine. The fear that's slowly creeping in on me is not the bright, urgent terror that blasted through me when I encountered the Earth Dragons and my mother. No, this is a darker fear, a deep dread that erodes away at my sanity.

These administrators... are they watching me right now, as I cower on the dungeon floor? Are they laughing their dark, grim laughs at my fear? This entire situation is terrifying. My skills, these things that I have relied on so hard for my very survival, are suddenly strange and unknowable. What am I going to do?

What am I going to do?!

Side Story 15: The Rank of Lord

The look in Hugo's eyes when he sees me has grown even more dangerous. He keeps glaring at me with a cold glint in his eyes. It's especially bad when I do something better than him, like scoring well on a test. His glare then sends shivers down my spine.

It's obvious that he's going to try something soon. However, I can't prepare any countermeasures. Unlike me, Hugo is the eldest son of an imperial dynasty. On top of that, like me, he is a reincarnated person as well, so his skills are no joke. Nobody is qualified to even hold a candle to him, be it in terms of political or physical power.

And then, it happens, on an ordinary day, while we're out on an exploration lesson; our first extracurricular activity.

For our activity, we were sent to explore a small mountain that was near the academy. Well, I say "near", but it's really over a half day's walk in each direction. Only the people who passed a test to determine if they were able to leave the academy were able to go on the trip. Out of my year, there were twelve people including myself who were granted permission to go on the exploration trip. Judging from my class, only the students who were crushingly excellent were able to make the mark. However, the students who were left behind have plenty of opportunity to make themselves stronger so that they can come along the next time. There might be only a few of us on our first trip, but each trip after that is sure to have more and more people. Rather, it seems like the criteria for granting permission is based on whether or not the students can work as a single team, so this year has a considerably excellent group of students.

We leave first thing in the morning, arriving at the foot of the mountain at around noon. After that, we enter a small cabin, where we're given one final explanation of what we're supposed to be doing, and then we eat lunch. After that, we're divided into teams and head off for the mountain. The schedule is fairly simple: we spend the rest of the day exploring the mountain, make camp for the evening, then return to the foot of the mountain by midday tomorrow so that we can head back.

This mountain doesn't have any monsters that could be classified as dangerous. Before the trip, the academy hires people to do an inspection of the mountain and confirm that this is, in fact, the case. Even a weak monster can become strong if it evolves, after all, so it's very important that the school confirms that this hasn't happened.

There are three main reasons for doing this exploration. The first is to teach us basic survival skills. The second is to gain first-hand experience of the kinds of environments inhabited by monsters. The third is to identify and collect various medicinal plants, learning about the ecology of the mountain. Since the purpose of this trip is to safely gather knowledge and gain useful experiences, going out of our way to deliberately attack monsters will cause our final grades to be penalized. If a monster attacks us, however, and we safely defeat it, then we'll gain bonus points. Ultimately, it is forbidden to purposefully provoke or attack monsters.

The groups we're divided into consist of four students and one teacher. Team selection is done by lottery, to prevent us from forming excessively unbalanced groups. Sue, Katia, and Yulie each wind up on separate teams. Meanwhile, I've been placed on the same team as Hugo. The four members of my team are myself, Hugo, Miss O (aka Filimes), and a boy named Palton, who is the son of a knight. When you include the magic instructor, Mrs. Oriza, we have five people in total.

Palton and I are acquainted, but aren't really close enough to call each other friends. Palton's father used to be a baron, but through many military exploits he improved his peerage and climbed up to the title of earl. He put Palton through very strict training growing up, so Palton has specialized in a lot of high-ranking physical skills. Both his physical strength and his grades are exceptional. He doesn't seem to think of himself as being particularly exceptional, so he constantly studies hard and trains harder. He's a very serious boy. When we interact, he acts like he's a mere retainer, so even though we talk, we're not really able to bond.

Mrs. Oriza is our middle-aged magic teacher. When she's in the classroom, it seems like she doesn't really want to be there, and that she's only putting up with it because it's her job. When she was assigned to supervise me and Hugo, she didn't even bother trying to hide the disgust on her face with having to do such a bothersome task. After all, the

alarmingly bad blood between me and Hugo is very well-known. However, since she is, in fact, a teacher, her combat ability is more than high enough. Although she's a magic user, she has a variety of skills that are very well-suited for close-range combat, and her ability scores are far greater than that of any student. If something unexpected should occur during this outing, it's a teacher's job to protect her students, so there's no way that they would have sent someone weak to accompany us.

What surprised me was that Miss O, aka, Filimes, was diligently participating in these exercises. Frequently, she'd disappear from class without any warning. It seems like she was always going off to do some sort of secret mission, the details of which she'd never actually tell us. Since she was skipping class without even getting permission, I'm sure she must constantly be extremely busy. I'm very surprised that she'd come out here, effectively locking herself in one place for nearly two days to go on a field trip.

However, since Hugo is coming with us, I'm actually kind of relieved that she's going to be accompanying us too. She's the only person I know who's actually capable of stopping Hugo, probably including all of the teachers at the academy.

“Well then, let's get started right away. After you have finished with your lunches, please split up into your individual groups and be on your way.”

With that final statement from the teacher in charge of the trip, the explanation assembly was over. We eat our lunches quickly, then organize ourselves into groups and prepare to head off into the mountains.

“Brother,” says Sue, “I must bid farewell for now. I will be so lonely.”

“Sue, it's only one day. Don't exaggerate so much.”

“Even a single day is a huge problem! I'll be so worried that something might have happened to you where I can't see you that I won't be able to sleep at night.”

“I'll be fine. They've already made sure that the mountain's safe, so as long as nobody does anything reckless nothing bad can happen.”

I gently stroke her worried head. The mountain isn't the danger I need to be looking out for. My fellow partymember is far more dangerous, but there's no way I'll tell her that, since it'll only make her worry harder.

Katia briefly pulls me aside. "Shun," she whispers, "Be very careful around Hugo, okay? That asshole seems to have totally cracked ever since he came to this world."

"...Got it."

Katia's words echo in my head as we depart. He's cracked. That's certainly the case. The Hugo of today is absolutely not normal. He seems so dangerous that it wouldn't be the slightest bit weird for him to try to do something while we're out here.

The exploration proceeds smoothly, despite my worries. We don't run into any monsters, and soon arrive at the area that we had planned to make camp at.

"Prince Slaine," says Palton, "shall we make camp here?"

"That sounds good. We got here way more quickly than I was expecting."

"That's 'cause you boys are so stro~ong," hums Miss O. "It was hard for a girl like me to keep up with yo~ou!"

"Yeah, bullshit," scoffs Hugo. "Oka, your stats are pretty great, right? No fucking way you get to whine about this."

"O~oh, I think that a really good man would have pretended to be concerned, e~even if he knew that he didn't need to!"

"I'm not gonna be the kind of man that pays close attention to every single woman."

"Aa~ah, even the tough-guy type can say 'yeah, sure, why not', though!"

As Hugo and Miss O banter back and forth, Palton and I start setting up our camp. Mrs. Oriza watches us silently.

"Prince Slaine," says Palton, "May I ask you to stand over there, please?"

"Ah, sure. Like this?"

"Yes, thank you. Next, please follow along like this."¹

"Aha! All finished. Thanks, Palton."

“Not at all. This was, unfortunately, a task that I am not currently able to complete by myself, so I was unfortunately forced to trouble you for your help.”

“Palton, we’re both students at the academy. Social stature doesn’t matter. There’s no need for you to care so much about bothering me, okay?”

“We certainly may have different social stature, but I also personally respect you deeply, Prince Slaine. I am acting like this purely because I want to. Please, there is no need to apologize for my behavior.”

There is no arguing with Palton’s honest eyes, so I drop the subject. Sue has her own reasons, but what have I personally done to deserve that kind of respect? It really is strange.

Since we arrived earlier than anticipated, we have some time to kill after we finish setting up camp. We decide that we should spend some time to explore the surrounding area, splitting up to cover more ground but not straying so far from each other that we get truly separated. I’m initially opposed to going off on our own individually, but we eventually decide that we’ll remain in earshot of each other. That way, if anything were to happen, the rest of the party could immediately rush over to help.

And, so, I’m alone in the mountain. Collecting and identifying medicinal plants will give me extra credit towards this assignment, so I explore the area, searching for medicinal plants with Appraisal activated.

Then, I hear the sound of clashing weapons.

It’s coming from the direction where Palton was exploring. The sounds, however, are unnaturally quiet. I don’t know if it’s because the enemy’s weapon is specially constructed to be quiet, or if some sort of sound-dampening skill is being used, but they’re so quiet that an ordinary person wouldn’t be able to hear it at all. I, however, have Enhanced Hearing, and can hear them clear as day.

I immediately rush over to where Palton is fighting, only to be stopped by the figure of a boy standing imposingly in my way.

Hugo.

“Sup,” he says, a cocky smile on his face.

“What are you doing, Hugo? ...No, Natsume.”

“Well, you know... I’m thinking that right now would be a great time for you to make your exit.”

Hugo talks calmly, as if nothing special is happening at all, but I can’t stop tension from creeping into my voice. He’s saying some seriously unbelievable things with a perfectly straight face. I gulp, without thinking about it.

“You’re joking, right?”

“Does this look like a fucking joke? You’re an eyesore.”

In an instant, the smile vanishes from Hugo’s face.

“This world is *mine*. It was made for me. I am going to be the strongest, and I am going to rule it. And, yet, there’s you. Someone on my level, maybe even a little better. That’s not a good thing for me, you know?”

“What kind of nonsense are you talking about, Natsume? Nobody owns the world. Snap out of it.”

“Snap out of it? There’s nothing to snap out of. Isn’t world amazing? If you have skills, you can do whatever you want! It’s like a dream. My dream. How could this world exist for any other reason but to be *mine*? Yeah, though. I don’t need anyone like you in my world. So, die.”

Hugo draws his sword. I have no choice but to do so as well. I activate Appraisal and look at his stats.

Human – LV 31 – Hugo Von Rengzand

Statistics:

HP: 628/628 (green)

MP: 566/566 (blue)

SP: 609/609 (yellow), 502/611 (red)

Avg. Offense: 608

Avg. Defense: 599

Avg. Magic Power: 546

Avg. Resistance: 522

Avg. Speed: 583

Skills:

[Automatic HP Recovery (LV 4)] • [Accelerated MP Recovery (LV 4)] •
[MP Consumption Reduction (LV 4)] • [Accelerated SP Recovery (LV 8)] •
[SP Consumption Reduction (LV 8)] • [Mana Perception (LV 8)] •
[Mana Manipulation (LV 5)] • [Battle Magic (LV 5)] • [Mana Allocation (LV 4)] •
[Offensive Magic (LV 2)] • [Damage Enhancement (LV 7)] •
[Slashing Enhancement (LV 7)] • [Bashing Enhancement (LV 4)] •
[Greater Fire Resistance (LV 4)] • [Battle Spirit (LV 7)] • [Willpower Allocation (LV 7)] •
[Offensive Willpower (LV 7)] • [Greater Fire Attack (LV 3)] • [Paralysis Attack (LV 2)] •
[Sword Skill (LV 6)] • [Throwing (LV 5)] • [3-D Maneuvering (LV 6)] •
[Concentration (LV 9)] • [Prediction (LV 3)] • [Computation (LV 3)] • [Aiming (LV 8)] •
[Evasion (LV 8)] • [Stealth (LV 3)] • [Silence (LV 1)] • [Fire Magic (LV 3)] •
[Damage Resistance (LV 2)] • [Bashing Resistance (LV 2)] • [Slashing Resistance (LV 3)] •
[Fire Resistance (LV 3)] • [Poison Resistance (LV 2)] • [Paralysis Resistance (LV 1)] •
[Pain Resistance (LV 1)] • [Enhanced Vision (LV 10)] • [Telescopic Sight (LV 1)] •
[Enhanced Hearing (LV 10)] • [Audible Frequency Expansion (LV 1)] •
[Enhanced Smell (LV 8)] • [Enhanced Taste (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Touch (LV 8)] •
[Greater Vitality (LV 5)] • [Greater Mana Pool (LV 4)] • [Body Flicker (LV 5)] •
[Greater Endurance (LV 5)] • [Greater Strength (LV 5)] • [Greater Toughness (LV 5)] •
[Greater Magic Power (LV 4)] • [Greater Resistance (LV 3)] • [Teleportation (LV 5)] •
[Emperor] • [n % I = W]

Skill points available: 350

Titles:

[Monster Slayer]

He's strong. Unlike me, his physical stats are very high. He's got a very stable sort of strength. On top of that, also unlike me, he's used a lot of his skill points proactively to acquire useful skills. The worst part of it, however, is his Emperor skill.

Emperor: Increases the effects of all skills. Furthermore, applies the corruption-attributed effect (Fear) when the user attempts to intimidate a target.

It seems like I can resist the intimidation-based Fear effect. The effect that boosts the effectiveness of all other skills, however, is some real foul play.

Hugo lifts his sword high, then swings it straight down on me. I block it with my own blade.

Ngh, it's heavy!

“Heh, I knew it. You never spent any of your skill points to get skills, did you? And you never bothered raising your level. Points are meant to be spent, bitch! Like this!!”

Hugo's sword is suddenly engulfed in raging fire, and he takes another enormous swing at me. I dodge out of the way, and it misses me by a hair's breadth.

“Man, if I keep doing flashy attacks like this, the others are bound to notice. Let's wrap this up quickly, okay?”

“You actually think you can wrap things up that neatly?”

“It's fine, it's fine! I'm the future ruler of the world, right? Everything I do will be forgiven. Also, I put in a lot of work on this! Right now, my subordinates should be just about done with taking care of the rest of the party. After I finish dealing with you, they're going to release a monster. A really strong one, too, one that's way more powerful than anything that really should be here right now. Here's how the scenario's going to look: we suddenly get jumped by a really strong monster and the poor, poor teacher and her students all get eaten, except for me. I defeat the monster, return to base camp, and nobody will be the wiser.”

“What a sloppy plan. You think nobody will accuse you of anything?”

“Who? Who’d try? Bitch, this isn’t fucking *Japan*. I’m the next Sword Emperor! This whole thing might look a little bit fishy, but who the hell would dare say anything? That would be an international fucking incident if they did. You see how it is, right? This isn’t *Japan*, it’s not like every crime has to get reported here.”

I’m dumbfounded. This is a terrifyingly un-Japanese concept that’s coming out of Hugo’s mouth, and he seems perfectly okay with it.

“See ya. I’ll make sure to remember you, in the tiniest corner of my brain.”

An enormous, blazing flame erupts from his sword, and he lunges forward, stabbing straight for my heart. However, the attack never connects.

Hugo is suddenly thrown aside by a powerful blow.

“Natsume, you’ve gone too far.”

Devoid of its usual stupid affectations, a chilling voice sends shivers down my spine. An overwhelming aura presses down on me, entirely unsuited to the little elf girl that it’s coming from. There, at the edge of the clearing, Miss O has appeared.

“Your plan has already been ruined. We’ve captured every one of your summons, and the monster you brought along has been appropriately disposed of.”

“W... what?!”

“It seems like you’ve been keeping an eye on Shun, but you’ve completely underestimated me. I’m sorry, but I can’t have you rampage around like this any longer.”

She walks towards the fallen Hugo. When she gets close, he tries to take her by surprise, but he’s immediately smashed down into the ground, as if by an invisible fist. That’s undoubtedly the same attack that threw him off me before, probably some sort of powerful wind-type magic.

She places her hand on Hugo’s head. I can see currents of mana flowing. Some sort of spell is being placed on him.

“I invoke my authority as a Lord. By my command, I invoke the skill granted by my title. Do you consent?”

“I consent,” says Hugo, in a dead, flat voice entirely unlike his own. Was that magic just a little while ago the forbidden Corruption Magic’s hypnotism?!“

My shock does not end there. Instead, I only grow more and more shocked. Hugo’s Appraisal results are *changing*. Rapidly, his stats drain away. Then, one by one, his skills vanish. When it’s done, the only thing he has left is the mysterious corrupt-text skill.

“Wh...?! What did you do to me?!“ he shouts, finally back to his normal self. “I lowered your stats and removed your skills.”

“Wh?! There’s no way you co—”

“Shun, his Appraisal results?”

“...It’s just like she said, Hugo. Your stats are all down to about 30, and your skills are all totally gone.”

“Wh... wha...”

“This world is not yours. I recommend that you think long and hard about what has happened here, then figure out how to live as a normal person from here on out. Even if you can become stronger with skills, I don’t think that’s a very good thing at all...”

Hugo is left in a stupor. My mind is in chaos.

After that, the exploration lesson was cut short. Palton and Mrs. Oriza are both unharmed. Things may have been very dangerous, but thanks to Miss O’s assistance, nobody was seriously hurt.

All of Hugo’s subordinates were caught and brought in, but not a single person claimed any ties to Hugo. Since he feigned complete ignorance as well, he got off scot-free. Was that decision made with international relations in mind? Once again, I’m forced to recognize that what’s common sense here is not at all what it is in Japan.

Incidentally, after I get back, Sue clings to me, crying until she's completely exhausted.

Translator's notes for this chapter:

1. *Palton is remarkably vague here, and there's no real description of how the campground is set up. Since it's largely unimportant (and I have no idea what the hell they could be doing at this point in the setup process), I haven't attempted to fill in the blanks.*

